

"HANDCARVED COFFINS"

Screenplay

by

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based on the novella

by

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Reg. WGA

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ROLL CREDITS.

AS THE LAST CREDIT FADES:

A TITLE APPEARS in white letters:

This is the true story of an
American crime

The TITLE FADES to:

EXT. TRAILER PARK, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO - NIGHT

Ugly even in spite of the mountains against the night sky
in the distance.

The trees cast distorted shadows as the moon clears.

A deer springs over the fence. As from within a trailer come
the reckless SOUNDS of a man and woman lost in passionate
lovemaking.

INT. TRAILER - NIGHT

Clothes flung all over the place, books piled and spilling
over each other: books on theology, books about guns, Mark
Twain, Melville, Teilhard de Chardin, Hans Kung, books on
the science of criminology. Chess books.

The GIRL cries out, makes a wild gesture and knocks over a
pile of books. We see the lovers uncoiling -- serpentine
motion of their sweaty bodies. The girl is voluptuous, not
more than nineteen or twenty. The MAN, haggard, in need of
sleep, is Jake Pepper. A man with serious eyes. Late thirties,
pale Irish skin, good looking, not vain but proud.

The girl bounces up, naked, heading for the bathroom.

GIRL

Jake, I just bought a bird.
A cockatoo.

Jake looks away from her. He rummages through old packs of
cigarettes, finds one as she FLUSHES the toilet.

GIRL (cont. o.s.)

I wanted a bird and I thought,
dammit, I'm going to have one.
My boyfriend just freaked out.
He almost broke my elbow.

(cont.)

GIRL (cont.)

But now that he's moved out of the house, he's treating me differently, more like a person.

Jake is caught by the sight of the deer cropping a garden - in the moonlit trailer park. Pushing shut the window, he lights his cigarette. Staring.

An electronic chess machine seems to have the place of honor in the trailer. It's plugged in and is BEEPING SOFTLY. Jake sighs, takes a short breath as if to help himself out of the bed, picks up his drink and brings it over to the chess machine. Jake assesses its last move.

JAKE

Boris, you're a totally perfected asshole.

He moves. The machine audibly signals his victory. The trailer lights flicker and go out. From the bathroom, the girl swears, FLUSHES again.

JAKE

Goddamit!

He pounds at the wall. The lights come on. The chessboard's electronics are now totally disoriented, and all its lights are flashing. The shower BLASTS on.

JAKE AT RECORD PLAYER

An ancient KHL portable stereo. Jake puts a record onto it, an old 78. A light, breathy rendition of "BEGIN THE BEGUINE."

EXT. TRAILER - NIGHT

Jake climbs barefoot up a ladder onto a roof. He has his cigarette and a drink. The SOUND OF COLE PORTER pounds faintly on the night air -- incongruous in the spectacular shabbiness of the trailer court -- its power lines and T.V. antennae and rusty awnings. In the moment before dawn, the stars blaze violently overhead. Jake listens to the music. He is beginning to shiver in the night cold.

A screen door BANGS open and shut.

GIRL'S VOICE

(shouting)

Jake! My boyfriend will kill my ass, I don't get home before sunrise.

No reply.

GIRL
(louder)
Jake! Jake Pepper, where in hell
are you at?

ON JAKE

Sitting, drinking, staring out at the great black western sky. He's asking himself the same thing.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY - NIGHT

An electronic bank sign shows 5:33. The streets of this desert metropolis look deserted -- and ugly. Even now there's the NOISE of diesel trucks on the highway.

A ten-year-old Datsun moves along the street heading for the highway.

Jake is driving. He's dressed neatly in a suit and tie, and he's drinking from a paper cup. And he looks like he never went to sleep.

INT. JAKE'S CAR - NIGHT

The VOICES OF THREE DISPATCHERS mingle from the three radios of Jake's car. He presses a switch and picks up a microphone.

JAKE
(into microphone)
Federal thirteen to Arapahoe
control.

DISPATCHER
(through radio)
Go ahead, Federal Thirteen.

JAKE
Advise Unit One my ETA is
approximately ten thirty and
rolling.

DISPATCHER
I copied thirteen. I'll see
he gets the message.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAWN

Headlights on bright as the car speeds along an empty highway. Sagebrush on both sides of the road.

CAMERA PULLS BACK and we see the sun's coming up: the sky is paling behind distant mountains; the stars at the zenith blaze in the clear air; and gradually the landscape is suffused with color.

And silence.

EXT. DESERT - DAWN

A moving point of blackness in the dazzling enormous emptiness of the desert. It turns into Jake's car.

RANCHES - (VARIOUS SHOTS) - DAY

Horses cantering in the early light. Cattle grazing. Distant windmills and barns. Wide-open rangeland.

As Jake sees them, driving past.

EXT. COTTONWOOD TREES - DAY

Their leaves tremble and flash in the morning wind.

The SOUND OF A RIVER

EXT. RIVER - DAY

A strong river, thirty or forty yards wide, moving between low banks and occasional clumps of cottonwood and willow. It is like a river in Eden, sweet and clear and undisturbed.

Something flicks through the air and dances on the water.
A trout fly.

ANOTHER ANGLE

A WOMAN (ADDIE MASON) in waders, stands hip-deep in the river, reeling in a fly line. A fine-boned woman -- early thirties, perhaps, with an intelligent nose and pale eyes against tanned skin. Lithe and strong; her movements are sure and graceful, and she's easy with, but not heedless of her beauty.

She begins stripping off line to cast again, her expression one of beautiful concentration.

EXT. ADDIE FISHING - LONG SHOT - DAY

From Jake's POV as he speeds along the highway beside the river.

In the distance, kicking up dust.

INT. JAKE'S CAR - DAY

Jake is sweating and stoically pissed off; smoking. The side windows are open. The windshield splattered with bugs. Jake is jiggling A/C control. He bangs on the dash. It's obviously not working. The engine sounds ready to seize up. Jake sees something through the car windshield. In a murmur that is unreadable as his face:

JAKE

God is great.

JAKE'S POV THROUGH WINDSHIELD

White billowing smoke swirls up from under the hood.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

Wreathed in clouds of smoke, Jake peels the car off the road and parks. Then he gets out of the car. He watches Addie.

She whips the rod forward and back, forward and back, spinning off yards of line -- then casts far out across the river.

A trout takes the fly.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

A HIGH-PITCHED WHINE - Jake's engine. Addie looks up. She meets Jake in a look.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

ON JAKE

Pleased to have seen her. He takes out a cigarette, lights it, inhales deeply and starts walking.

The sun is higher and Jake is hiking toward us, his abandoned car far in the background. He stops, his eyes on something o.s., behind us, and puts on the jacket that had been held slung over his shoulder.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Close on owner.

CLAUDE HOSKINS is drinking a quart of milk, staring thoughtfully and skeptically o.s. at Jake.

ON JAKE WALKING

His figure quivering in a heat mirage.

FULL SHOT THE GAS STATION

It is a neat-as-a-pin, one-pump operation. We can HEAR the desultory SOUNDS OF CAR REPAIR from a service stall. Jake approaches the man, stops. He is a sweaty, disheveled mess. His shoes are immediately noticed.

JAKE
My car overheated.

CLAUDE
(eyeing his shoes)
Not surprised.

JAKE
Maybe a mile down the road.
Can you tow me?

CLAUDE
Nossir. Not much. No tow truck.
(shouts off)

Byron!
(sound of a tool dropping
to ground)
Can't pee like I used to, neither.
(illustrates with gestures
of his right hand)
Goes to here 'stead of there.

Approaching from the service shed is BYRON, a young, grease-stained mechanic with pale wisps of beard.

BYRON
What, Claude?

CLAUDE
Man's vehicle vapor locked on itself.
Probably the heat, though it could be
meanness.

(gesturing to Jake,
then Byron)
Let him have the keys, he'll have
a look at it.

JAKE
(reaching into pocket then
handing over keys)
Thank you.

Byron glowers at Claude. Goes.

CLAUDE (over)
Sure. I'm kindly. You want to wait
(cont.)

CLAUDE (cont.)
for Dr. Byron's diagnosis or
don't you feel like pukin' this
early in the day?

JAKE
Can I use your phone?

CLAUDE
Phone's down. Always is, if it's
too hot or too cold.

We see a yellow Mercedes pull up by the solitary pump. The car is daubed with dried mud. A woman dressed in worn riding clothes is driving: JUANITA QUINN. A striking older woman of Spanish and Indian ancestry. She's a little thick in the waist but a classic beauty. Aloof and proud. Her car draws an expensive-looking horse trailer, four sleek-looking cutting horses aboard. The trailer bears the legend "BQ RANCH."

Claude opens a cash register drawer, takes two quarters and slaps them on an oil drum as he stares out at the big car.

CLAUDE
Go on and have yourself a soda
while you pray on it. Gonna be
a hot one today.
(moving toward car)
Tubbs Chocolate Peach Ripple's
all that's left. Union soldiers
took the rest in '85.

Jake watches him go, then takes the quarters and deposits them in the soft drink machine. He pushes the button, a can slides down, he takes it, stares at the label with a mild, deadpan incredulity.

Claude sticks the gas nozzle in the Mercedes. Jake stands in the shade of the garage, watching as he sips at his soda. The front window is sliding down as:

CAR RADIO ANNOUNCER (over)
Coming up on the news in seven
minutes -- meanwhile beef prices
started lower this morning...

CLAUDE
Mornin', rich and powerful Missus
Quinn. The usual and put it on your
bill, or are ya plannin' just to set
there relishin' our hateful and
envious thoughts?

JUANITA

She laughs.

JUANITA
How's your wife, Claude?

CLAUDE
She was warm the last time I
touched her but that was two
years ago, Juanita.

JUANITA
(shakes her head)
You be good to Vesta, Claude.

CLAUDE
I will.

As he steadies the gas nozzle in the Mercedes tank, he sees that Juanita is staring out the window, and he follows her gaze to Jake, who is unmoved, the soda in his hand.

Juanita gives him the once-over, but discreetly. Jake's shoes and appearance don't set too well.

JAKE

Puts on his best smile.

JAKE
(calling)
Excuse me, are you passing
through Penasco?

The front window silently rolls up with a soft electronic whirring SOUND. Juanita is looking straight ahead through the windshield, impassive.

ANGLE THROUGH SIDE WINDOW AT JAKE

Jake stares blankly. After a pause, he buttons his top shirt button, tightens his tie, rises and walks up to the car window. He slips out his wallet, holds his I.D. up, tapping his badge against the window glass.

JUANITA
Oh.

The window sinks down.

JAKE
Sorry. My car's broken down
and I have an appointment in
town with Sheriff Andersen.

Claude appears, puts his head down to window.

CLAUDE
I can vouch for him, Juanita.
He's a personal friend of Byron's.

JUANITA
Sure. Hop in.

CLAUDE
(to Jake)
Byron's highly influential in
these parts. The man's feared.

INT. MERCEDES - DAY

As Jake goes around and gets in on the passenger side,
Claude leans in.

CLAUDE
Appreciate the trade, Rich and
Powerful Missus Quinn, and the
goose Bob put in my post office
box. All the world loves a
colorful and generous despot.

We HEAR Juanita's LAUGHTER as they pull out onto the highway.

JUANITA
Might I ask where you come from,
Mr. Pepper?

JAKE
Schenectady.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The Mercedes roars by a modest ranch house on the outskirts
of town. It looks like a realtor's snapshot. A ten-year-old
Cadillac is parked in the driveway in front of a closed double
garage. GEORGE EMMONS, a cheerful middle-aged man dressed for
work is watering the lawn.

A pickup truck pulls up in the gravel bordering the lawn. We
recognize Addie Mason, the girl we saw fishing. When she
speaks, her voice is cultivated but it still has a warm lilt
to it, a pleasantly girlish quality.

GEORGE
(waving)
Hiya, Addie. How you?

ADDIE
(calling out)
George, you want some fish?

GEORGE

Still got a freezer full, Addie.
You want some coffee or a beer?

ADDIE

(shaking head)

I'd love a beer, but I've got
to get back for class, George.

GEORGE

Well, you work too hard.

ADDIE

(pulling away)

You say hello to Amelia for me.

ON GEORGE

GEORGE

I will. Bye, Addie.

INT. MERCEDES - DAY

Jake watching through the windshield. A small town growing
closer.

JUANITA

Pretty boring out here, compared
to Schenectady.

Beyond the town are mountains. The sky is bright blue, stream
with a few white puffs of cloud.

JAKE

It seems like a nice, peaceful
place.

It's like a picture postcard: the colors are slightly too
bright, too rich.

JUANITA

It's always peaceful. Only the
river runs headlong here.

EXT. CLOSE TO TOWN - RIVER AND BRIDGE - DAY

The Mercedes enters town, crossing the river (where it swings
close to town) by a nondescript cement bridge. A fresh green
and white sign planted by the bridge reads:

PENASCO, N.M.
Pop. 5,600

EXT. PENASCO - MAIN STREET - DAY

Morning peace and quiet. A cheerful neat western town. It's not pretty but a little sunshine and blue sky make it look pleasant, like a homemade breakfast.

Nobody's on the street. A few pickups and cars are parked near the "Okay Cafe," the town's only restaurant. The most prominent thing in town is the water tower.

The Mercedes is driving straight at us.

An Australian cattle dog trots out of a doorway into the middle of the street. The Mercedes brakes. The dog begins to BARK at Jake, as he exits the Mercedes.

JAKE

I'm much obliged.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

CLEM ANDERSEN, the local sheriff, is clearly pleased to see Jake as he motions Jake into his office. Clem is a big red-headed fellow, about fifty, and fifty pounds over his fighting weight. A marvelously uncomplicated man who loves his handmade boots and his cookies as much as he does people.

The walls of his office are decorated with trophy heads (a moose, a big horn sheep) and photographs of his woodcarvings and his numerous children. To Jake the office is exotic. To Clem, it's home. He holds the mouthpiece of a phone to his chest.

CLEM

(to Jake)

Good to see you! You chasin' spies down here or what?

(yells back through door)

Loreen, bring us another coffee, will you hon?

While he speaks on the phone, Clem stares dismally at two cookies wedged between the saucer and his cup.

CLEM

(into phone)

Well, what was he doin' climbin' down the side of the church in the first place?

(listens briefly)

Playin' Dracula?

(listens briefly again)

Missus Kinyon, could you hold for just one second? Please.

Clem covers the telephone mouthpiece with his chest.

CLEM

(yells back through door)

Loreen, I wanted peanut butter cookies.

LOREEN (o.s.)

They were out of them.

CLEM

(pain)

Shoot..

Loreen, a curvy girl Deputy, comes in with a paper cup of coffee.

LOREEN

There you go, Mr. Pepper. And would you like a cookie with that?

Jake looks at her -- and sees her absolute innocence.

JAKE

Thank you, but no thank you.

Clem motions him to a chair and Jake sits heavily as Clem resumes his phone conversation. Loreen edges out -- but doesn't bother to shut the door behind her.

CLEM

Look, Missus Kinyon? I don't think it's really all that practical to go arrestin' a damn nine-year-old boy.

(listens briefly)

Even if it is your son. It's sorta --

(listens)

Yes, I know that he sassed you, Ma'am.

(listens)

And then tried to drink your blood. Missus Kinyon, strange things can sometimes happen. Look, I really have to run now, ma'am. When he's better, you make a citizen's arrest.

He puts the phone down.

CLEM

(to Jake)

Well golly if it ain't a real -- life G-man.

Jake holds up his I.D.

JAKE
I'm Jake Pepper.

CLEM
Sit down and take a load off
your feet. You want some
cookies with that?
(leaning back in chair)
Can't seem to think after twelve
without my cookies. What'll it
be, Mr. Pepper?

JAKE
It's Jake. Could you find me
some scotch?

Like a shot, Clem's hand darts into a cranny of his desk and
in a flash comes up with a bottle of J&B and slaps it onto
the desk with:

CLEM
It might be hard.

INT. OUTER OFFICE/DISPATCH OFFICE - DAY

Loreen is leaning over the counter, giving the inside to an
OLDER WOMAN DEPUTY who's monitoring the radio.

LOREEN
(importantly)
He's a Special Agent. I seen
his card on Clem's desk.

The older deputy speaks across the room to ANOTHER WOMAN.

OLDER DEPUTY
I told you he was comin' today.
We better shape up, I reckon.

All the women laugh.

INT. CLEM'S OFFICE - DAY

Clem has his feet on his desk, a clipboard and files on his
lap. Jake is in a chair pulled up by the desk, scrawling a
note onto his scratchpad. Both men sip at shot glasses of
scotch as they talk.

JAKE
And Addie Mason?

CLEM
Good gal, Addie.

JAKE
Where do I find her?

CLEM
Over to the school. That's two
blocks north and just one mile
east. She's a teacher there.
Great gal.

JAKE
(writing)
I'm sure.

CLEM
Great gal. She can put a bullet
between your eyes at a hundred
yards and she knows enough karate
to split an oak plank with a chop
of her hand.

JAKE
Great gal.

CLEM
I know. Hey, Jake, take a look
at this.

Jake glances up. Clem has reached and taken a photograph of
a woodcarving from the wall, slides it over to Jake. It is
a strange, layered woodcarving.

JAKE
(eyeing it)
Yes?

CLEM
What do you think of it? Honestly.

JAKE
What is it?

CLEM
(dismayed)
Can't you tell?

Jake shakes his head.

CLEM
A stack of pancakes. I carved
it out of pine.

JAKE
It's very delicate.

CLEM

It's different. I'm working on a hot fudge sundae. Now that there's a challenge.

As Clem sips his drink, Jake stares at him for one inscrutable moment.

JAKE

Clem, my car broke down and I don't know when it's going to be ready. Is there one that I can borrow for a couple of hours?

CLEM

You sure can. Use my jeep.

JAKE

That's very kind.

CLEM

You stayin' over?

Clem has the scotch bottle in hand and is lifting it to refill Jake's glass. Jake puts his hand over the glass, as he stands.

JAKE

Depends on my car. What's the nearest motel like?

CLEM

Thirty dollars a day -- and rumor has it -- that includes the price of a woman.

(laughs)

JAKE

Well, let's hope that won't be necessary.

CLEM

Jake, I'm kinda hopin' that it will. You're good company. Not everybody appreciates my carvings.

Claude has dropped his gaze to Jake's shoes.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

We are looking down the length of the street. To the side, in f.g., a shoe store. Jake emerges, hobbling slowly and awkwardly in a new pair of western boots.

ANOTHER ANGLE ON JAKE

As he clumps along.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Peaceful and pretty, cottonwood leaves glitter in the hot air. A bunch of KIDS are playing at roping a calf: the calf is a figure of iron pipe on wheels, with plastic horns that revolve around a central post.

Jake walks past them and into the school building.

INT. WOLF CREEK SCHOOL - DAY

It's about fifteen minutes after school has let out. Classrooms stand empty. A few stragglers are gathering their things. A TEACHER is packing her papers to go home.

Jake hobbles towards her.

JAKE

Excuse me. Do you know where I can find Miss Mason? Addie Mason.

TEACHER

Her room's down the end of the hall -- if she's still there.

Jake continues until he reaches an open classroom door. He looks inside.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A woman is sitting at the teacher's desk, marking papers. She looks up. She's wearing a light summer dress -- her hair pulled back and tied with a rubber band.

It's Addie. Jake immediately recognizes her as the woman he saw fishing in the river. A sweetness seeps into his expression of surprise.

ADDIE

(a friendly smile to a stranger)

Hello?

JAKE

Are you Addie Mason?

ADDIE

Yes, I am.

JAKE
(showing I.D.)
Jake Pepper.

INT. LOCKERS - DAY

Addie exchanges AD LIB goodbyes with departing students as she goes to her locker, Jake following, trying desperately not to hobble in the boots.

Addie, repressing a smile, glances down at Jake's curious walk.

ADDIE
New boots?

JAKE
You can tell?

ADDIE
Yes, the label's still on them.

And, swiftly, naturally, and unexpectedly, she stoops and tears the label string from each boot. Straightening:

ADDIE
(wryly deadpan)
Now no one would ever guess that
they're new.
(eyeing the tags)
Oh, I've done an awful thing. One
says "Left," one says "Right."

Fighting down a grin, so that only the ghost of it survives, and quietly taking and pocketing the tags. Then she holds up one of his business cards.

ADDIE
You really work for the FBI?
I guess you do.

She opens her locker and takes out a heavy stack of fish wrapped in plastic ice packs. Dripping wet. Jake staring.

JAKE
Here. Let me carry that for you.

ADDIE
Oh, thank you.

JAKE
What do you teach?

ADDIE

Good manners mostly, we start
pretty raw down here.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

A couple of kids ride their bikes in figure eights around the playground. They wave to Addie as she walks toward her pickup with Jake. He's carrying her load of fish. Heavier than he thought.

Addie covers a giggle with her hand. As Jake struggles unsteadily with his load uncomprehending:

JAKE

Ma'am?

ADDIE

Is Jake Pepper really your name?

JAKE

(annoyed)

Look, I'm doing a background investigation on a boy in your class when you taught tenth grade.

ADDIE

Who? Why?

JAKE

Lynn Peacock. He's applied for a job with the C.I.A.

Addie really gets the giggles.

ADDIE

Of course, he'd be fantastic for this job. He was always keen on poking into things, mostly freckled little girls in the cloakroom. I utterly adored him.

Jake looks up in dismay.

Addie puts a hand on Jake's arm, as if guiding and supporting.

ADDIE

No, the heels are supposed to feel loose. You'll get the hang of it.

JAKE

(with a delicate edge
in his voice)

You can let go of me now.

ADDIE
(wryly)
Shall I help you to your car?

JAKE
You're very kind.

INT. CLEM'S OFFICE - DAY

Clem looks up as Jake enters.

CLEM
How'd you like Addie, Jake?

JAKE
Great gal.

CLEM
Ain't that the truth.

He reaches under desk, comes up with the scotch. As he pulls off the cap:

CLEM
Time ta talk sense, son.

CLOSE ON JAKE

As his glass is filled to the brim.

CLEM
Claude said his phone got fixed
and if one more miracle happens
your car just might be ready by
noon tomorrow.

JAKE
For sure?

CLEM
He said maybe for sure.

Jake knocks back half of his drink.

CLEM
Where'd you ever learn to
drink like that? The Army?

JAKE
Kind of an army.

CLEM
(picking up bottle and
pouring another)
Were you a Green Beret?

JAKE

(the ghost of a wistful smile)

No, black.

CLEM

Now, I never heard of no Black Berets, but sure as hell I know why you hardly ever talk. I bet your breath could bring the dead back to life.

JAKE

That would be nice.

Tilting the glass for the last of the scotch.

CLEM

Phew! Who was that masked man?

JAKE

(rising; holding up empty glass)

Thanks, Clem. For everything.

CLEM

You stayin' at the Armpit Lodge or you want to come home with me and see our place? Take supper with us.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - EARLY EVENING

Jake beside him, Clem drives a customized jeep: no top and no windshield, mostly an engine with four wheels and a -... electric winch. On the driver's side, a rifle mount is attached, a Ruger deer-hunting rifle locked in it. Clem is munching zestfully on a Snickers candy bar as:

CLEM

I call it my "pot luck" wagon. Comes a buck or a doe across the road and --

(pantomimes shooting through windshield)

Bang! You get a quick, clear shot. And a full meat locker.

JAKE

Have you gotten much game this way?

CLEM

(thin-lipped)

I will.

Clem turns the wheel into:

EXT. SMALLER ROAD - ALLEY OF TREES - EVENING

The jeep turns onto a road between two lines of tall cottonwoods, a lovely stretch of country. We are far in front of them as we HEAR, distantly:

CLEM

I liked it better when you were quiet.

JAKE

Are you sure I'm not putting you out?

CLEM

No way. We've got loads of room.

EXT. RANCH ROAD AND HOUSE - EVENING

The road comes out of the trees and runs alongside a big pasture with a half dozen horses in it, then a neat frame house comes into view, and out of the front door pours a throng of children of assorted ages, waving and calling out in greeting. Clem waves back.

CLEM

Hi, kids!

Clem drives the jeep into garage, in which we see woodworking equipment, a canoe taking shape. Clem and Jake get out of the jeep. As the children swarm to them, Clem scoops up a little girl. JOSIE, Clem's youngest.

CLEM

Hey, good lookin'! What's cookin'?

The children are all over their father. Josie, her arms around Clem, kisses his cheek.

JOSIE

(shyly)

Hi, good looking!

CLEM

(to Jake)

We got a whole bunch more around here somewhere.

CLOSE ON JAKE

A little sadness. Something he's missed; never had.

And BUSTER, aged nine, is tugging at his father's trousers.

CLEM

Jake -- say hello to my boy
Buster -- I told him you worked
for the bureau and he wanted to
shake hands with a real live
detective.

JAKE

Hello, Buster.

INT. ANDERSEN KITCHEN - NIGHT

The kitchen is full of the steams and smells of cooking. Standing at sink counter with a load of fish, are Addie, Clem's wife, AMY, a mildly pretty woman, and Amy's elderly mother, TILLIE. Addie wears riding clothes, still hasn't removed her jacket as she dumps her defrosted catch into the sink.

ADDIE

I thought you guys might like
some fried trout tonight. Kinda
puny. But they'll eat good.

SOUND of the door opening; Clem, Jake and the children come barging in.

CLEM

(eyeing fish)

Used to be you could count on
landing a six-pound rainbow with
the first cast.

(holds up small trout)

Back before the diversion dam.

Addie is removing her jacket, and Tillie is moving toward the sink like a shark through the shallows.

TILLIE

I'll clean them.

ADDIE

Oh, they're gutted and cleaned,
Tillie.

AMY

(under her breath)

Bless you.

TILLIE

I like cleaning them.
(regretfully)
Sparkly little scales.

CLEM
We got company, Amy!

AMY
Good! The more the merrier, I say!

INT. FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

It's very comfortable and alive.

Clem still has Josie in his arms. CLEM JR. -- aged thirteen -- in muddy clothes coming in -- he's been out roping.

CLEM JR.
Trixie's got a rupture. I called
Dr. Baker and he wants me to
bring her in tomorrow.

The other children are between nine and thirteen and they too are seeking his attention, everyone talking at once. Jake is hanging back by the door, watching.

CLEM
(at the children)
Alright now, hush up.
(indicating Jake)
He's a Black Beret and he likes
it quiet.

Amy exits from the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron.

AMY
Scoot you, children! Scoot!

Amy's is the voice of authority in this household, for the children are already taking off as:

AMY (cont.)
Scatter like the autumn leaves!

Moving toward Clem and Jake.

CLEM
But I just got here.

AMY
Your breath arrived an hour and
a half ago.
(extending hand to Jake)
Hi there, I'm Amy Andersen. Who
are you?

CLEM

Amy, this is Jake Pepper. Jake's
with the FBI.

AMY

(cordially as she takes his
hand and shakes it)
Federal Bureau of Intoxication?
Your breath is even stronger, Jake.
You must work at this.

CLEM

-(turning to Jake)
What did I say?

AMY

About what?

CLEM

Nothin' sugarpie, Jake's car
broke down. He's gonna stay over
with us the night.

JAKE

Oh, well no, I don't think so.

AMY

There's no problem, Jake.
(to Clem)
I'll put Buster and Josie in
their sleeping bags.

CLEM

(to Jake)
Which they love! They love those
damned smelly old sleeping bags
even more than party balloons and
parades!

Addie appears in the kitchen door, hands dripping, smelling
of fish.

ADDIE

Why, hello again.

ANGLE ON JAKE

As he turns to look at her.

JAKE

(softly)
Hello again.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Dinner is being eaten. Throughout, Tillie quietly forks staggering quantities of food into her mouth without cessation while listening wide-eyed and attentively to the table conversation.

Jake isn't eating. He's watching Addie. Clem's hopping around like a big flea taking polaroid pictures of everybody.

ADDIE

Amy, this is just great.

JAKE

Really wonderful, ma'am.

CLEM

Amen.

AMY

It was Addie did the hardest part, catching the fish.

ADDIE

Which takes a brain about the size of a lima bean. Cooking is the thing.

CLEM

(raising his camera)

God bless the cooks!

ADDIE

(raising her glass)

Hear, hear!

JOSIE

(in her little voice)

And the Fudgesicles.

As all laugh, except Jake, staring at Addie, buzzed a bit His thoughts in the past.

CLEM (o.s.)

Now are those my genes or what!

INT DINING ROOM - LATER

Quieter. The Andersen children have left the table. Empty dessert dishes. Brandy and cigarette time, except for Tillie, who is still eating dessert.

ADDIE

You're a very quiet man, Jake
Pepper.

CLEM

Isn't he though?

ADDIE

I'll bet Clem's been handing you
a lot of bull about our nice
little town. You must think we're
real boring.

CLEM

(a mild but sincere
surprise)

We're not?

ADDIE

Well, this may seem to be a Garden
of Eden, Jake, but we do have our
witchcraft aficionados, our dope
fiends and our wife swappers. All
of the things that make life worth
living.

ANGLE ON TILLIE

Still forking pie into her mouth, her eyes grown wider as
she listens with a smile of relish to:

ADDIE

We've even got fellahs wearing
panties underneath their dungarees.

Jake lowers his gaze to his coffee as Clem comes in with
cigars and offers one to Jake. But Jake is taking cigarettes
from his shirt pocket.

CLEM

You like a cigar, Jake?

JAKE

Not right this minute, Clem.

As Addie strikes a match and lights Jake's cigarette:

ADDIE

Are we interesting now or just
cowflop?

(Jake coughs on the
smoke)

I'd much rather light your cigar.

Clem, seemingly oblivious to the double-entendre, routinely proffers a dish of mints to Jake, who remains inscrutable.

CLEM

Have a mint, Jake.

ADDIE

I'm partial to the smell of cigars. If I smoked I think I'd smoke cigars for days and days and days.

CLEM

Addie, who's wearing panties under his jeans?

AMY

(picking up dishes as she comes in)

I think I'd better start on the dishes.

ADDIE

(to Jake)

You're stone.

(rising; to Amy)

Let me help you, Amy.

Following Addie with his gaze as the women go toward the sink to start doing dishes:

CLEM

I don't want any deputies of mine doin' that.

ADDIE

(calling)

They don't. I've checked.

CLEM

(to Jake)

She don't mean that.

Clem's daughter Josie comes up to him.

JOSIE

Daddy, Buster hurt my feelings.

CLEM

He did?

FRONT SHOT AT SINK ADDIE AMY

They speak softly, a womanly conspiracy. b.g., Clem's conversation with Josie is indistinct, but we see him sit her on his lap as the women run the tap water to cover their conversation.

ADDIE

The man's a hunk.

AMY

The way he keeps staring at you.

ADDIE

I know. It makes me feel like he's mentally stripping off every stitch that I'm wearing, one by one.

AMY

It looks a little more fatherly if you ask me.

ADDIE

Are you crazy?

CLOSE ON JAKE

Staring toward Addie as we HEAR Amy, and then Addie, giggle low o.s. and:

JOSIE (o.s.)

Well, it wasn't very funny.

CLEM (o.s.)

No, sweetheart, I don't think it was funny either.

JOSIE (o.s.)

He said "brux" to me, Daddy.

CLEM (o.s.)

"Brux" is a terrible word.

JOSIE (o.s.)

He's always picking on me.

CLEM (o.s.)

No, it's just how little boys are.

Jake turns toward Clem and Josie's conversation, registering warm approval, an admiration for Clem's tenderness with his daughter.

FEATURING CLEM AND JOSIE

Josie is on Clem's lap, her knuckle rubbing at the corner of a teary eye.

CLEM

They're just mean little skunks that grow up to be a total.

JOSIE

What's that?

CLEM

It's the orneriest thing in the world. It sounds like a thousand rabbits screamin', smells like two-million-year-old cat breath, and the whole smelly thing is all made out of lip.

ON JAKE

Laughing. Josie laughs.

JOSIE

Oh, Daddy!

CLEM AND JOSIE

CLEM

(kisses her; then:)

Just be glad you're a girl.
Now get ready for bed.

ON ADDIE AND AMY

Amy turns back to us from looking around at Jake.

AMY

I think that man just smiled!

ADDIE

Oh, my God!

AMY

I think you've got him where you want him.

ADDIE

Table's fine.

CLEM AND JAKE

More conspiratorial laughter from the women as:

CLEM

A little nightcap?

JAKE

(shaking head, sipping coffee)

No, thanks.

Buster has erupted into scene, fronting his father. Buster is in pajamas, carries his toothbrush and has a mouthful of toothpaste.

BUSTER

Josie said that I stink and
then she told me to shut up!

Clem drops his hands to his sides, as if to gun holsters.

CLEM

Want to see my fast draw?

BUSTER

Yeah; let me see it!

Clem's hands do not move an inch, yet:

CLEM

Want to see it again?

ON JAKE

A little laugh, but a very big smile -- innocent and happy.

EXT. CLEM'S HOUSE - NIGHT (RAIN)

Jake is running toward a pickup, Addie's. The front door to the house is open. In the doorway, Clem stands with his arm around Amy's waist. Calling out as he runs:

CLEM

Try to catch the parade tomorrow.

JAKE

I'll try. Thanks again!

CLEM

(loud, for Jake)

Who was that masked man, Amy?

INT. ADDIE'S PICKUP - NIGHT (RAIN)

Jake gets in, pulls door shut. Addie waves to the Andersens.

JAKE

Sweet people.

EXT. DOORWAY TO CLEM'S HOUSE - NIGHT (RAIN)

As we HEAR the pickup departing, we see Clem and Amy.

AMY
(waving)
I sure hope she gets laid tonight.

CLEM
(waving)
Say a little prayer.

EXT. STARLITE MOTEL - NIGHT (RAIN)

Addie's pickup rounds a corner and pulls up onto the loose gravel in front of the motel. The motel is small and strung with tubes of pink neon lights along the rain gutters.

ON JAKE

Looking out at the o.s. motel.

INT. ADDIE'S PICKUP - NIGHT (RAIN)

Jake slowly turns his head and stares straight ahead through the windshield wipers in fly time.

ADDIE
Want a drink?

JAKE
Yes, I think so.

ADDIE
Nearest bar that's open now is
thirty miles.
(affects a Chicano accent)
Wanna come an' meet my seester?

Jake smiles at her. Addie pops the clutch and peels out.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Rain easing. Addie's pickup pulls into a wide graveled driveway, and she parks in front of a big triple garage.

ADDIE (o.s.)
This used to be a ranch, believe
it or not.

EXT. ADDIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A large two-storey house with generous verandas -- turn of the century -- impeccably maintained. Lights shine from the windows and it's surrounded by ample space.

ADDIE

We sold off most of it when the town grew out this way, but we still raise everything we eat.

Jake follows Addie up the walk to the front steps and stops.

A big German shepard is standing there. Jake makes a slight move, the the dog begins BARKING loudly. Faintly, we HEAR another SOUND. PIANO playing and raucous SINGING.

ADDIE

(to dog -- not loudly)

Pilgrim -- come here.

The dog instantly stops barking and trots up to Addie. Jake comes up on the porch -- and follows Addie inside the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Everything is good and old and taken casually in this house. MARYLEE CONNORS, Addie's sister -- a widow in her fifties -- and Jake are well into a bottle of brandy.

Marylee sings and plays the piano. An old Tom Lehrer song.

MARYLEE (o.s.)

(singing)

"When the shades of night are falling, all around the neighborhood, you'll see the old dope peddler doing well by doing good ..."

Addie is talking as she brings in another bottle of brandy for Jake to open. Marylee continues in the background, occasionally flubbing a note and starting over.

ADDIE

I'm glad you like this house, Jake. Our grandfather built it -- and after our daddy passed on, Marylee just looked me in the eye and said "come home." I traveled the world three times, and then came back home to Penasco.

She turns and looks straight into his eyes.

ADDIE

Can I ask you something? When you look at me -- well, you look sort of strangely at me.

JAKE

I do?

ADDIE

Yes, you do, Mr. Pepper.

(beat)

Don't you want to find out what
I wear under my jeans?

JAKE

Do I?

ADDIE

What's stopping you?

JAKE

(sad smile)

You remind me of someone. A young
girl. Long ago.

ADDIE

Was she special to you?

Jake nods.

ADDIE

What happened?

JAKE

She died.

The conversation is developing in a way Addie did not foresee
or want, but she is interested.

ADDIE

I'm sorry, how old?

JAKE

Seventeen.

Marylee plops herself down on the sofa near them, spilling
much of her drink as she lands.

MARYLEE

How's you ass, everybody?
Are we cozy? How's your
drink, young stranger?

JAKE

I'm fine.

MARYLEE

Well, hurry up with it. My sister
wants to get you drunk. Incidentally,
where's this house you're putting up?

JAKE

House?

MARYLEE

House. You're not a contractor?

Jake's eyes hold Addie's as:

JAKE

No, ma'am.

ADDIE

Jake is with the F.B.I.

MARYLEE

Oh, well, I knew it was something like that.

ADDIE

Aren't you planning on sleeping soon, or something?

MARYLEE

No, I want to tell a joke first.

ADDIE

Oh, my God.

MARYLEE

Well, it seems there was this ...

In mid-sentence, Marylee falls sideways on the couch, sound asleep, and then onto the floor. Muttering into the rug:

MARYLEE

Some house. Put some stairs in it ...

And she snores.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN IN ADDIE'S HOUSE - DAWN

Jake and Addie have been talking all night. They sit at a small table in front of a big window. The drinks they are sipping from mugs are more likely coffee than whiskey now. The room gradually brightens with the pale orange light of dawn.

JAKE

How is it a girl like you never married?

ADDIE

I've been married. Once. Only once. He was a beautiful boy. A musician. He played the guitar. Oh, we traveled all over together on a motorcycle. For a year. That's all. One year.

She is affected; rubs her hands along the surface of the mug.

JAKE

And what happened?

Tears threatening to well up in her eyes. Jake reaches his hand across the table and takes hers. Holds it.

ADDIE

What makes me want to tell you
these things?

JAKE

I don't know.

She squeezes his hand in both of hers, holds it against her bowed forehead; collects herself; goes on:

ADDIE

-- Right after we got married we found out that he had cancer. Toward the end he was so weak that I'd have to hold him up in the shower -- he couldn't stand. I found him on the floor once near the refrigerator. He'd tried to open up the door, but he was just too weak and he collapsed from trying. But he never complained. Not once. He had a smile for everyone. At the start he said he didn't want to take any drugs. But then he had to. And he started --

She is interrupted by piano-playing. Marylee is awake and is playing "Girl of My Dreams." Jake turns his head to the song, listening; remembering.

JAKE

Go on.

ADDIE

Well, the night he died he was hallucinating. Or something. He seemed to see people in the room. "What happens then?" he said once. I'd just come in and he was staring straight ahead and to my left. "What happens then?"

She seems to be listening to the piano for moment. Then:

ADDIE (cont.)

That night he said, "Life is so simple, Addie. I finally understand. It's so simple." Then he went into coma and he left us.

JAKE

Did he ever explain it?

ADDIE

(coming back, didn't hear)
I'm sorry. What was that?

JAKE

"Life is simple." Did he ever explain that?

ADDIE

(shaking head)

No.

(looks at him)

Are you religious?

JAKE

Am I a religious?

ADDIE

No, are you religious?

JAKE

(nodding)

A religious.

ADDIE

Same as me.

JAKE

(smiles)

I don't think so.

ADDIE

Do you think life goes on? When we die? Do you, Jake?

After a long hesitation: A magnificent lie.

JAKE

Beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Marylee appears at the kitchen door with her cigarette and drink in hand.

MARYLEE

Do you want your eggs scrambled,
fried, or as usual, completely
fucked up?

EXT. MAIN STREET - PENASCO - DAY

It's a fine day.

A HIGH SCHOOL BAND is marching straight at us. BLARING--"The Stars and Stripes Forever."

Marching under a banner stretched across the street announcing "Penasco Kiwanis Fourth of July Festival."

The sidewalks are lined with friends, relatives and visitors. Western hats of all kinds; American flags everywhere, glowing in the sunlight.

Now we get a sense of the town.

It's not pretty, but a little sunshine and blue sky make it look pleasant, like a homemade breakfast.

FLOATS

PENASCO 4-H CLUB. Kids with scrubbed faces and scrubbed calves, proudly riding a flatbed decorated with lots of crepe paper.

PENASCO/TREASURE VALLEY RAINBOW GIRLS: sweet, plumpish teenagers. Waving majestically, flashing their braces, displaying their homemade formals.

VARIOUS SHOTS - PARADE

HAUGHTY EAGLE SCOUTS, EAGER CUB SCOUTS

LOS RANCHEROS, the Penasco High School Band.

SHRINERS

Led by Claude Hoskins, the gas station owner, and his wife VESTA. A plump and cheerful matron.

FLOATS WITH OFFICIALS

There's the MAYOR -- there's the D.A., BILL WAUGH, in a morning suit. A short, pear-shaped and sleek man. And DR. CALE, the coroner wearing an old fashioned undertaker's outfit.

There are also INDIANS faces. Two OLDER MEN with granite faces; another bloated and distorted beyond belief. A YOUNG MAN with an exceptional face and bearing untouched by time. He watches mute, expressionless.

The crowd around him reacts to something coming -- something they've been waiting for. They crane forward to look, they focus their cameras.

HORSES AND RIDERS

The climax, the meaning of the parade. These beautiful horses. Palominos, Arabians. Their riders are dressed for show: fancy outfits, silver saddles, handmade boots. We see:

JUANITA QUINN

Aloof and proud.

SHERIFF CLEM ANDERSEN

Duded up for the day, riding a big horse, accompanied by his kids on their horses -- and ADDIE looking beautiful, and a gorgeous rider. All of them holding flags out from their stirrups -- very dignified, proud. Clem spots Jake.

CLEM

(calling)

Jake! Hey, glad you made it.

IN THE CROWD - JAKE

From the sidewalk; watching

ADDIE ON HORSEBACK

Making a small show of surprise at seeing him there. Waves.

JAKE

Looking like someone stranded in a foreign country. He waves back.

VARIOUS SHOTS - RANCH FAMILIES ON THEIR HORSES

The parade isn't just small and funny now. There's a beauty, a fascination to these people -- men, women and children -- who seem to be living out that American dream of the ranch and the horses.

CUT TO:

EXT. PENASCO CITY RIVERSIDE PARK - DAY

COUNTRY MUSIC. Barbeque, dancing, picnicing and horsing around.

COUNTRY MUSIC BAND

Hired from Lubbock. Pretty good. Playing country for a lot of happy Texas two-steppers.

BEER CONCESSION

Moving the beers fast. A Kiwanis goldmine. It loosens people up. We're starting to HEAR a lot of LAUGHTER, SHOUTS and YELLS.

Jake comes up, buys two beers and moves towards the dance area.

DANCE AREA

Jake approaching.

As Clem stoops to hand a gigantic cotton-candy ball to Josie, and with a hand on her hip, a lit cigarette in the other:

AMY

You know you're helping their
bodies form fat calls.

CLEM

Them's the breaks.

Jake hands a beer to Clem and Clem demonstrates that he can walk and drink at the same time.

PARKING AREA

MUSIC from the band continues over the parking lot, which is full of pickups, whispering KIDS, discreet transactions.

CLEM

(between swallows)

Jake, I know nothin's happened
in Penasco since the Flood -- but
we'd like to see you back, social.

JAKE

Thanks, I think I'd like that.

CLEM

Let me sweeten you up.

Clem pulls out a pint of scotch, spikes both their beers. They pass a WOMAN, SOMENHAT FLASHY, who's leaning against a pickup, chatting with a YOUNGER MAN.

CLEM

(to woman)

Hiya, Susan. How you?

WOMAN

Fine and dandy, Clem.

Clem and Jake move past her.

CLEM

Susan Stanley. She's got the
whore franchise in town. Closest
we can offer to a shrink.

Jake laughs, glances back. Clem hands him the bottle -- they
stop for Jake to drink.

CLEM

Listen, I got to dance with my
old lady or she's liable to
leave me for a damn cowboy.

JAKE

Sure, go on.

Clem strides ahead, and Jake follows slowly, thoughtfully,
strolling toward:

ADDIE

Leading her horse into its trailer. The sun shines in her hair;
if anything, she looks even more beautiful now, wearing old
riding britches, shiny with age. Scuffed snakeskin boots. A
faded old Harley Davidson t-shirt. As she turns, the front of
her shirt proclaims: "God rides a Harley." Her whole face
smiles at Jake.

ADDIE

Hi.

JAKE

I like your shirt.

ADDIE

It belonged to my husband.

JAKE

I probably would have liked
him, too.

ADDIE

(sad smile)

Yes. You would.

JAKE

I wanted to thank you again
for last night.

ADDIE

No, I should be thanking you --
Jake. For listening. You're a
good listener. I hope I didn't
make too big a fool of myself.

EXT. THE EMMONS HOUSE - DAY

We're looking at a modest ranch house on the outskirts of town. We recognize it from the beginning of the film. The ten-year-old Cadillac is parked in the driveway.

GEORGE and AMELIA EMMONS come out of their house, dressed for fun. They're looking forward to going to the picnic together.

GEORGE

I'm just going to turn off these sprinklers.

AMELIA

Oh, dear. We left the car windows rolled up.

Amelia decides to take off her suit jacket -- then freezes in mid action.

AMELIA

Well look at that!

GEORGE

What is it?

AMELIA

That coreopsis -- it's dead as a doornail.

She goes over and yanks out the withered plant and carries it to the spotless garbage can. George, having turned off the sprinklers, goes to the passenger door of the car, but stops to check his pockets. Amelia, taking out car keys, goes to the driver's side.

GEORGE

Amelia, did you by any chance mail that water bill?

AMELIA

George, I have it right here in my purse. Hurry or we'll miss the last dance.

They hop into the car.

INSIDE THE CAR - DAY

Amelia is backing out of the driveway. George is turning on the air conditioner. As the car swings into the street he glances under the dashboard.

GEORGE

What's that?

EXT. THE CAR AND THE STREET - DAY

The car moves straight down the road for twenty, thirty yards
Then it swerves violently, first one way, then another.

It shears off a mailbox. It sideswipes a concrete ditchhead.
It tilts into a shallow ditch running alongside an open field.

LOOKING INTO THE CAR

George and Amelia are screaming and struggling like souls
in hell -- because they are being attacked by seven heat-
maddened RATTLESNAKES.

INSIDE THE CAR

SCREAMS. Nightmare. The snakes are everywhere. They strike
from the floor, they flow over the seats, they drop from
the visors. Hissing, striking, biting.

The Emmons' hands scrabble at door latches that swing loose.
That won't work.

The landscape outside the windows is sunlit and serene.

FROM OUTSIDE - LOOKING INTO THE BACK OF THE CAR

The car shudders from the convulsions within.

Finally it goes still. Only the engine is running.

Because of the tinted rear window we cannot see clearly into
the car -- but after a moment a rattlesnake flows against
the glass of the rear window, like a stream of muddy water.

EXT. NEIGHBORS HOUSE - DAY

The neighbors -- the ROYBALS, a retired couple -- are pulling
in -- come out of their car together and stand in driveway.

They stare at the Cadillac, tilted askew in the ditch.

After a moment, Mrs. Roybal decides to take a look. Her
husband follows her nervously.

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - DAY

Loreen, the girl deputy, tears the pickups in the parking
lot. And a moment later, Clem Andersen comes running out
with Jake right behind him. Clem jumps in his car and Jake
jumps in his.

EXT. EMMONS HOUSE AND EMMONS CAR - DAY

One lone deputy holds a loudspeaker -- facing a small but growing crowd of onlookers. He's a spotty kid and his voice is full of panic. SOUND of an approaching SIREN.

DEPUTY

Everybody get back. Please,
good people, move on back now.

Clem's car peels in, LIGHTS FLASHING, SIREN HOWLING. Clem jumps out and goes to the deputy, grabs the microphone.

CLEM

(into speaker)

Clear the area, folks, please.
I said clear the area.

Now there is some backward movement. Clem switches off the speaker.

CLEM

Where's Randy?

Jake comes up from behind them.

DEPUTY

He's behind the house, pukin',
Sir.

They all look towards the Emmons car -- about twenty feet away. Clem moves forward ahead of them. And whatever he sees, he's never seen before. He starts to bend over to make it out. Clem stops dead in his tracks.

CLEM

Oh my sweet Savior. Oh,
dear God.

Jake moves right up to the car and stoops a little to look inside.

INSIDE THE CAR -- THE BODIES

Swollen greenish pumpkin heads; swollen balloon figures that have emerged from the Emmons' clothes -- the venom has turned both into these Halloween figures: mouths open in the terrible smile of the dead, eyes staring.

They move!

Because a rattlesnake slithers through the bodies to strike at the window.

JAKE

He flinches -- pure animal reaction. But he can't seem to move from the spot for a moment.

IN THE CAR

Another rattler strikes at the glass.

SCENE

Clem walks back to SENIOR DEPUTY RANDY. He's wiping his mouth, trying like hell to compose himself.

CLEM

How many snakes are in that car?

DEPUTY

Seven or eight of 'em. Maybe more.

Clem walks away abruptly. Jake goes after him.

ON CLEM AND JAKE

Clem is ashen. Jake takes two cigarettes out of Clem's shirt pocket, lights one -- and puts it in Clem's hand.

CLEM

I knowed them all my life, Jake.

(pauses for breath)

I'll be okay in a minute.

Jake turns and looks at the Emmons car for a moment.

The young deputy, booted, helmeted is hauling on gauntlets. The other deputy, Randy, is loading his shotgun, hauls on a bulletproof vest.

JAKE

(finally, to Clem)

Clem, why don't you call our Fish and Wildlife office in El Paso. Tell them to send a field agent out here.

(at Clem's look)

You want to get those snakes out of there alive.

CLEM

What for?

JAKE

Accident, suicide, homicide?

CLEM

That doesn't make sense, Jake.
These people didn't have an
enemy in the world.

INT. FUNERAL PARLOR EMBALMING ROOM - DAY

The bodies of George and Amelia Emmons, covered with white sheets, lie on the embalming tables. Jake is staring at them. He looks up when Clem comes in with two men we recognize from the parade. One is Bill Waugh, the D.A. and the other is wearing a white coat, Dr. Cale, carrying a manila envelop. A man who looks like he has a permanent headache or indigestion; or both.

CLEM

Couple of people I want you to
meet -- Jake, this is Bill Waugh
our District Attorney.

They are shaking hands as introduced.

CLEM (cont.)

Any Jimmy Cale. Our County
Coroner.

Dr. Cale pulls bottle of maalox out of his pocket and takes
a healthy swig.

DR. CALE

(wiping his mouth)

Yessir.

WAUGH

Clem called me, says 'you mind
if we call in the Bureau?' and
I said hell no. We're all kind
of in shock here.

JAKE

Dr. Cale, I'm aware that you're
the coroner here, but --

DR. CALE

(holding up a hand)

No problem. Clem can bring in
whoever he likes. I don't want
to do the autopsy anyway. Mrs.
Emmons was a patient of mine.

(hands Jake the envelop)

These are her medical records.

(cont.)

DR. CALE (cont.)

(beat)

Have you ever been bitten by a rattlesnake? They say that it feels like a red-hot knife.

A silence. Jake takes out a pack of cigarettes, offers it to Waugh and Dr. Cale, who decline.

DR. CALE

What I don't understand is why Amelia and George got into that car. Those snakes must have made a racket like a buzz saw.

EXT. EMMONS HOUSE AND CAR - NIGHT

Big flood lights are lit up. The voices of POLICE RADIOS call across the fields. The crowd hasn't grown much bigger.

And everybody's focused on one man. The Fish and Wildlife Agent DAVE BLEDSOE. He's cut a hole in the car door -- making a conduit for the snakes to crawl into heavy canvas trap. Driven out by the heat gun of a local deputy working through a hole in the window on the other side.

After a moment the canvas trap begins to move and thrash.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EMMONS HOUSE - NIGHT

Clem is going through the drawers of a desk in the living room, looking for notebooks, letters, checkbooks -- anything. Jake comes up behind him and looks at the desk.

JAKE

You shouldn't touch those with your hands, Clem.

CLEM

What?

Jake holds up his hands, gloved in plastic baggies.

CLEM

Oh.

JAKE

Are these their children?

Lots of photographs in novelty frames: the Emmons: the Emmons on vacation: the Emmons' friends: the Emmons with the Roybals. Dogs. Couples with babies.

CLEM

None of those are. They had no kids of their own. He's got a mother in a nursing home. She's supposed to have a sister in Denver, nobody knows her married name.

Jake moves a picture revealing a ceramic pair of praying hands.

JAKE

It'll be on a letter or a card.

He opens a cubbyhole in the desk and takes out -- some Christmas cards. And a small, blonde wooden box about eight inches long: it looks like a small jewelry box. Sorting through the cards he comes up with a Christmas "family picture": a husband and wife and several kids. He hands that to Clem.

JAKE

Maybe that's her.

Jake opens the box -- and in the bottom is yet another snapshot of the Emmons again.

PHOTO IN JEWELRY BOX

Disturbing. Because it's a candid snapshot of George and Amelia. Crossing Main Street. Unaware they are being photographed.

JAKE

Looking at it.

VOICE

Hey, Jake!

Jake looks up toward the Voice, puts the box back in the desk and moves away.

JAKE

What is it?

INT. KITCHEN AND GARAGE - NIGHT

Randy, the other deputy, is standing on the threshold of the door leading from the lighted kitchen to the dark garage. He's peering into the garage when Jake comes up.

RANDY

Listen.

4

They listen. Like them, we can HEAR a disturbing SOUND: a RATTLE -- a pause -- another RATTLE.

Jake takes out his gun. He flips up on the garage light. Now we see why the Cadillac stayed out on the driveway. The garage is full of things like garden equipment, camping equipment, a small powerboat on a trailer, etc.

Jake cautiously moves into the garage, looking for the source of the SOUND.

He finds it. It's a rock polisher, churning away on a workbench. He turns it off.

There's silence. Too much silence. Jake puts his gun away and leaves the garage.

EXT. EMMONS HOUSE - NIGHT

Deputies are sealing the house.

EXT. CRIME SCENE - NIGHT

A PHOTOGRAPHER and FORENSIC TECHNICIANS are still taking pictures and measurements.

We see Jake standing in the open garage door, watching Bledsoe taking off his protective clothes. He looks at Jake, approaching. Clem and Randy following.

BLEDSON
(shaking head)

Diabolical.

JAKE
Are they local?

BLEDSON
We don't grow rattlesnakes
of that calibre in this part
of the country.

JAKE
Seven of them. Hell that says
snake farm to me.

CLEM
You don't mean one of those
places that say rattlesnakes
and cold beer? I haven't seen
one of those in years.

JAKE
(ignoring)
Better take them to the lab
in El Paso for a check of their
stomach contents.

BLEDSON
You got it.

CLEM
What for?

BLEDSON
It might pinpoint where they
come from.

CLEM
What for Jake?

JAKE
It's definitely homicide.

CLEM
We're still a long ways from
that determination, Jake.

BLEDSON
It's beyond that determination.
The killer stripped the rattles
off those snakes.

CLEM
What for?

JAKE
So the Emmons would have no warning.

INT. "OKAY CAFE" - EARLY MORNING

The words curve backward on the glass. There's an unusually
loud babble of VOICES.

We see Jake and Addie cross the street and walk toward the
cafe. As they get nearer VOICES OVER comment AD LIB:
"Here he comes ..."

EXT. "OKAY CAFE" - STREET - EARLY MORNING

Addie is talking to Jake as they go.

JAKE
What did Emmons do for a living?

ADDIE

He was a lawyer.

JAKE

Maybe somebody didn't like the way he handled his divorce.

ADDIE

He wasn't that kind of lawyer, Jake. He mostly handled real estate, things like that. Amelia was his secretary.

JAKE

He ever talk about enemies? Someone who held a grudge?

ADDIE

He was so full of fun. They both were.

JAKE

Was he involved in any big cases?

ADDIE

No, he wasn't a great big success as a lawyer, Jake.

Jake opens the door for Addie, takes a couple of steps into the cafe and stops.

THEIR POV - THE CAFE

All the GOOD OLD BOYS (and GOOD OLD GIRLS) seems to have decided to have breakfast at the same time. And they're all looking at Jake and Addie -- or ostentatiously not looking. And a few are smirking. And whispering.

FOLLOW JAKE AND ADDIE

As they walk through the cafe to the only empty booth. Addie easily greets people she knows. They sit down.

A WAITRESS hurries with a coffee pot to pour in their cups on the table.

WAITRESS

You folks know what you're goin' to have this mornin'?

Somebody giggles.

JAKE

(turns)

Two fried eggs. Over easy. Toast. Coffee.

WAITRESS

Thank you.

ADDIE

Just the coffee, thank you, Helen.

She hurries away. Jake pours some milk in his coffee and glances around the room. Then at Addie.

She sips her coffee.

JAKE

You were the last one to see
the Emmons alive.

She swallows, nods, short, brief move of her head.

ADDIE

We were friends for my whole
life. They were like my grand-
parents. They felt they were.

Jake nods, takes a sip of coffee.

JAKE

No ex-husbands? Ex-wives?

ADDIE

No ex-anything. No reason.

Jake nods. A beat.

JAKE

No reason.

The words hang there in the air between them for a moment.

ADDIE

After you leave, Jake. Will
you think of us here?

He nods. Then:

JAKE

Yes, I will, I will think of you,
Addie.

ADDIE

And I'll think of you.

A silence falls between them. They look at each other,
mildly regretting the waste of a mutual attraction.

JAKE
Lock your doors and windows.

She shakes her head. Then:

ADDIE
You don't know Penasco, Jake.
It might not look like much,
but this is a real nice town.

EXT. THE HIGHWAY - DAY

Jake's car disappears down the road leaving the little town behind.

INT. FBI REGIONAL OFFICE - ALBUQUERQUE - DAY

A good-sized federal building sort of office with SIX AGENTS just getting down to work. The Special Agent in Charge -- MARION WEIS is handing out forms. A big austere-looking man -- he looks like the grandson of a Mormon Elder (which he is).

WEIS
This is a new form for your
travel vouchers, but they're
due on Friday just like always.

He hands one to Jake, who's getting a cup of coffee from the machine. Another agent, BASKIN, is waiting his turn at the coffee.

WEIS
Big Fourth, was it, Jake?

Jake, lightly, with a casualness he does not at all feel:

JAKE
Just a little local homicide,
Marion. A sweetheart of a case.

WEIS
Don't tell me, Jake. Put it in
writing.

Jake pulls a tape recorder out of his pocket and pops out the cassette. Hands it to Weis.

JAKE
Full report. Dictated in the car
this morning. Local man is begging
for our assistance.

WEIS
(looks at him)
Is there a Federal angle to
this, Jake?

JAKE
No, Marion, but ...

WEIS
I'm still waiting for the 202
on that woman who came in last
week. You talk to her yet?

JAKE
Marion, that woman thinks her
neighbors are talking to Russia
on their TV satellite antenna.

ON WEIS

His one expression does not change.

WEIS
Don't tell me, Jake. Put it
in writing.

INT. FISH & WILDLIFE LAB - EL PASO - NIGHT

Dissection tables, microscopes, spectrographs. Dead snakes.
To one side is the desk of Bledsoe. He is chain-smoking. His
crooked index finger grips the phone receiver.

BLED SOE
You've got your hands full, Jake.

JAKE'S VOICE (o.s.)
Why do you say that?

BLED SOE
Creepy killer. Gives me the shivers.
(a puff of smoke)
These snakes were shot through
with amphetamines. Injected. Who
could do that and then get them
into a car?

EXT. TRAILER COURT - NIGHT

The SOUNDS of TELEVISIONS echo back and forth between the
mobile homes. A BABY CRIES non-stop. A COUPLE SCREAM at each
other in Spanish. Our CAMERA MOVES IN on Jake's trailer. Through
a window we see Jake at his desk typing. A cigarette in his
mouth, a drink beside him.

BLEDSON'S VOICE (o.s.)
 I'll put the word out. Our
 snakelover shouldn't be too hard
 to find.

INT. JAKE'S TRAILER - NIGHT

The usual disorder. Another Cole Porter record is playing. The chess machine is active, starts BEEPING.

Jake stops typing, hangs up receiver, turns to study the machine's move. He clucks in disapproval, makes his move. He returns to his typing. The Cole Porter song ends, another begins: "I Concentrate on You." A little more typing, then Jake stops, listening to the music, his mind in the past now. Remembering something or someone.

He remains motionless for a moment, alone with the music and the disorder of the trailer. Abruptly he gets up and begins to straighten things up. The chess machine makes another move.

ON JAKE TYPING - LATER

Around him, the trailer is as neat as a monastic cell. An atmosphere of calm orderliness.

EXT. GOLF COURSE - EARLY MORNING

Exquisite and artificial. A Chicano gardener whisks the dew off a green with a long bamboo pole. Designer palm trees stand against a cloudless cobalt sky and the purple mountains rise in the distance.

A golf ball sails across the sky.

JAKE'S VOICE
 Way to go, Tom!

THE GOLFERS

TOM MCGRATH, an elderly bear of a man. A big untidy guy in crumpled slacks and a Sears knit shirt, whose face is scarred by pain and reflects the vestiges of a serious assault on his faith. He is using a Zippo to light his cigarette.

Jake drives and the ball flies down the fairway.

MCGRATH
 Twenty says you miss the putt.

As they stride down the fairway, they seem to have an easy acceptance of each other and a genuine friendship and love between them. With McGrath, Jake is relaxed.

The course ahead of them is immaculately cared for.

McGRATH (over)

It's a whole new ballgame, now, Jake. A kid comes in -- I tell him to work in a hospital for six months. Work with dying patients. Then come back and talk to me.

JAKE

I can't believe I spoke Latin for three whole years.

McGRATH

So how have you been, Jake?

JAKE

Living and partly, living.

McGRATH

How long have you been out here? one - two - years? You're looking good.

Jake positions his putting iron -- the ball is about five feet from the hole.

McGRATH

You still look like one of ours.

Jake glances up at him, putts. The ball rolls up to the hole -- and misses by an inch.

JAKE

(hands over a twenty)
You know what I miss? I miss the jokes. I haven't heard a goddamned Jesuit joke since 1975.

McGRATH

You got to have a life, Jake. You got to make a connection sometime.

JAKE

I go where they tell me to go.

McGRATH

You're not a priest anymore, Jake. You've been released from your vows. You're the one who likes to keep moving.

JAKE

Sometimes, when you don't know what to do, it's best to just keep moving.

McGRATH

Jake, why don't you come back to Georgetown and teach?

JAKE

No, I need to chase the bastards, Tom. I need that. Every scumbag that I nail means just that much less pain in the world.

This disturbs McGrath, and he stops in the middle of his putt to eye Jake, who looks directly at him.

JAKE

(defiantly)

I don't know if God's asleep or doesn't care. But I do. I care.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Jake and McGrath are changing. They have their dress shirts on now and they're fitting straps over their shoulders, fastening them in the back.

McGRATH

Is it true there's a Mormon Mafia in the F.B.I.?

JAKE

(a small laugh)

Out here, yeah, pretty much.

McGrath turns -- he's wearing clerical rabis: the black dickey with the roman collar.

McGRATH

So how do you get along with those guys?

JAKE

(turns)

Fine. We argue about theology.

Jake is wearing a shoulder holster. He takes a square butt Smith and Wesson out of the pocket of his golf bag and puts it in the holster.

McGrath hands Jake a slender, wrapped gift.

McGRATH

A little Christmas present. In advance. Your favorite.

JAKE

Cole?

McGRATH

That one there's an original. I hope your machine plays 78,

JAKE

It plays nothing but.

McGRATH

Yes. I know what you mean.

JAKE

Thanks, Tom.

They embrace and slap backs and grip each other tightly. McGrath is a comforting presence to him.

McGRATH

Enjoy it. Bring these cowboys some culture.

JAKE

What's your class next fall?

McGRATH

I'll be teaching ethics.

JAKE

(equivocally)

Good luck.

McGRATH

(laughs)

Those big classes in Gaston Hall will be something new for me. A challenge.

JAKE

Yeah, that's really what we need in this world, more challenges, Tom. Cancer and death are not enough.

McGRATH

If we're not being born, we're dying, Jake.

JAKE

(tight)

Yeah.

McGRATH

Jake, what is it?

JAKE

That kid. I can't get that kid out of my mind.

McGRATH

What happened to the baby?

JAKE

Did you ever burn your finger on a frying pan, Tom? You remember how it feels? From just that one little touch?

McGRATH

(softly)

Oh, God.

JAKE

Ask for the father, not the son, Tom. It's a man's job down here.

McGrath nods and laughs but he is uncomfortable.

McGRATH

And what else? There's something else.

JAKE

The bastard who killed him.

(pauses)

I refused him absolution.

EXT. RANCH ROAD - PENASCO - MORNING

A white speck in the distance. A little mail truck is slowly approaching out of the folds of rangeland.

INT. BUILDING SITE - MORNING

At the moment only the completed foundation of a good-sized house is apparent. Nearby, are piles of lumber and cement block. A few CARPENTERS are laboring. A TV antenna pokes out of the foundation which is roofed over.

Pushing up on a heavy trapdoor made of cement and metal is Claude's wife, Vesta, whom we recognize from the Fourth of July parade.

CAMERA MOVES WITH VESTIA TOWARD the mail truck coming closer.

To carpenters:

VESTA
How's it goin', boys?

CARPENTER
Still waitin' for those beams.

ON VESTA

Walking toward the roadside mailbox:

VESTA
Hurry up, boys, Christmas is
around the corner.

The POSTMAN chugs up toward the box. Vesta waves to him.

VESTA
Mornin', Ed. How's the new baby?

POSTMAN
Fine and dandy, Vesta. How you?

As Vesta takes the mail from Postman eyeing two magazines
at the top of the stack:

VESTA
I'm fine now that "Vogue" and
"Cosmo" came in. Where's Claude's
"National Enquirer" and his
"Humane News?"

POSTMAN
They're there.

VESTA
(she sees them)
So they are.

With a smile and a wave, as he starts away:

POSTMAN
Merry Christmas to ya, Vesta.

Sorting through the mail, heading back to the basement:

VESTA
(calling)
Merry Christmas.

We stay on Postman as he slowly proceeds down the road. After
we HEAR the TRAPDOOR CLOSING, the mail truck stops abruptly,
doesn't move for a moment, then backs up to the mailbox, into
which postman places a package he'd forgotten.

EXT. TRAILER COURT - NIGHT

The other trailers are decorated with Christmas lights, one of them with flashers. Only Jake's trailer is dark. Over the barren ground the wind keens and croons.

INT. JAKE'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Inside. The cigarettes, the scotch, the music: "You'd Be So Easy to Love." The chess machine is working. Jake is standing, pours himself more scotch, deep in thought. A SOUND from the chess machine tells him it is making its move. He turns his head to watch it. Then the move is completed, Jake moves over to the machine, leans over it, examining the position. Then his eyes come up, as he broods:

JAKE
Seven rattlesnakes. Why seven?

EXT. BUILDING SITE - PENASCO - NIGHT

CHRISTMAS CAROLS

Faintly heard, but near. Thin snow blows across rutted ground. The lights of Penasco town shine faintly in the distance.

Claude's house is almost framed out, a station wagon and a camper are parked nearby. Piles of building materials, covered by plastic sheeting.

CAMERA MOVES PAST the cars and the building materials, following a trodden path that leads to the trapdoor into the foundation. We HEAR CHRISTMAS MUSIC coming out of the basement.

INT. THE BASEMENT - NIGHT

A big expensive kerosene heater is blazing away. Claude Hoskins, the gas station owner, is showing Byron, his young mechanic, what they're going to do with basement when the house is finished. The CHRISTMAS MUSIC comes from a huge color TV set. Claude, on this occasion, is drunk.

CLAUDE
When we move upstairs. Did I tell you this? I told you, this is going to be the recreation room, What do you think?

BYRON
I don't know, Claude.

IN THE KITCHEN

MARIE, Byron's wife, and Vesta Hoskins (also with a skinful) are taking a big dinner from the stove: wild ducks, brussels sprouts, biscuits -- Marie's breasts and hips straining the seams of her dress.

MARIE

Hell, they're burned.

VESTA

They are not burned. They're perfect.

MARIE

Who cares, huh? I don't care.

LIVING ROOM

CAMERA STAYS NEAR the Christmas tree, sparkling with lights. Piled high around the base are boxed gifts, lots of packages. We catch on the periphery that Vesta and Marie are bringing the food out to a table set up in this room.

MARIE

We're finally going to eat, folks.

BYRON

Hey, we never opened our presents!

ANOTHER ANGLE

CAMERA MOVES SLIGHTLY, something is flowing down the wall behind the tree. It looks like a snake dropping from a ventilation hole at the top of the cement block wall.

But it's a stream of clear liquid: a thick stream.

VESTA

What's that smell in here?

CLAUDE

I don't smell nothing.

MARIE

'Course you can't -- you're half lit.

(a breath)

Oh my Lord, it's awful!

VESTA

It's the rug. Look, the rug is all soaked!

AT THE TABLE

They're all bending down to examine whatever's flooding the basement.

BYRON

That's kerosene.

CLAUDE

You know somebody must have knocked over a can. Because let me show you something.

He leads them to the heater and starts to rock it.

CLAUDE

Can't hardly be knocked over.

MARIE

Well where's this can?

Byron has moved away toward the tree.

BYRON

It's coming through that shaft!

CLAUDE

What the heck are you --?

BOOM!

EXPLOSION OF FLAME: the kerosene has been touched off at the air vent. Fire flies down the wall and the floor begins to blaze.

CLAUDE

Runs for the stairs. Byron follows.

VESTA

Looking at herself -- her clothes are burning.

VESTA

Oh Lord I'm on fire!

ON THE STAIRS

VESTA'S SCREAMS in the b.g. as Claude and Byron try to push open the trapdoor. And it doesn't budge. Smoke and flame billow behind them.

MARIE

Pulls up a rug to smother the flames on Vesta -- and the floor blazes up below it. She SCREAMS. Drops the rug. Vesta throws herself on Marie, who now tries to push her away.

BYRON AND CLAUDE

Screaming, pounding on the door.

VESTA AND MARIE

Wrapped in flames.

EXT. TRAPDOOR - NIGHT

MUFFLED SCREAMS and POUNDING from underneath the trapdoor.
Which is piled high with cement blocks.

Nobody's coming to save them.

EXT. HOSKINS' BUILDING SITE - DAY

Still cool and windy. Jake, Clem and Randy trudge from their cars toward the site of the fire.

Jake comes to the edge and reacts. He's looking at something pretty grim.

FIRE SITE

What had been the basement is just a charred hole in the ground. The only shapes we can make out are an exploded stove and some half-melted bedsprings.

JAKE AND THE OTHERS

CLEM

(points)

Over there, there's those cement blocks. They got thrown aside, you see, when they spotted the bodies -- 'cause they were lyin' right on top of the bodies. They were moved ...

(a beat)

Something real bad is going on down here, Jake. Thank you for comin' out.

Jake stares at the melted bedsprings.

JAKE

I liked that man.

(to Clem)

Is there any connection between these people and the Emmons?

Clem shakes his head. Then:

CLEM

A truckload of crazy glue couldn't connect 'em. No way. Nossir.

JAKE

Six people with no enemies?

CLEM

(checking watch)

Well, we'll just pray on it. Not a helluva lot more we can do here today. Jake, you better come by for Christmas dinner.

(moving away)

I promised Addie. You can kiss her under the mistletoe.

Clem waves cheerfully -- and Jake goes off to his car.

Clem's Deputy, Randy, approaches him with a small parcel wrapped in brown paper.

RANDY

I found this in the mailbox, Mr. Pepper.

JAKE

Open it up.

Randy unwraps it. A shoe box, tied with old twine. Inside:

A MINIATURE COFFIN

Carefully handcarved from blonde wood. It looks ... TO US ... somehow familiar.

Jake lifts the lid.

Inside the coffin is a photograph of Claude Hoskins, neatly trimmed to fit the box. He is crossing the gas station. He appears unaware that his picture is being taken.

RANDY

What do you make of it, Sir?

ON JAKE

Looking at the coffin. Suddenly he goes very still. His expression changes completely: like a man who feels a gun barrel against his spine.

EXT. HIGHWAY WITH EMMONS' HOUSE - DAY

Jake's car lurches to a stop in front of the house. It has a "For Sale" sign on the lawn. The neighborhood is silent,

a little spooky. Jake goes up to the front door and finds a realtors's lock on it.

INT. EMMONS HOUSE - DAY

The day is blindingly sunny; the house relatively dark. Some daylight comes through the heavy old curtains. Some furniture is still there. Cardboard boxes. A rolled-up rug. Faded spots on the walls where pictures have been taken down.

Something moves past a window. Outside. Jake prowling for a way to get in.

ANGLE ON KITCHEN DOOR

Flies open suddenly: Jake has kicked it in. He comes inside and tries the lightswitch. The power is off. He pulls out a handful of plastic baggies.

WITH JAKE

Moving through the empty house. He has a flashlight but he doesn't put it on -- there's enough light to see. But he stumbles over a midden of cans and trash in the empty dining room.

In the living room he doesn't recognize the desk at first, because it's turned around. He looks in a couple of boxes. He goes off into another room and comes back. And then he sees the desk.

HE FINDS AMELIA EMMONS' JEWELRY BOX

Shoved in the back of a drawer, along with a lot of the photographs that used to be on the desk. He removes the cheap jewelry, one piece at a time, from the small pale wooden box. On the bottom is a photograph of the Emmons.

Jake reaches in his coat pocket and takes out Claude Hoskins' coffin -- wrapped in a plastic sack. He puts them side by side and shines the flashlight.

JAKE

His concentration is so great his face is curiously blank.

EXT. POSTMASTER'S HOUSE - DAY

A tidy little bachelor's cottage. We can see through the glass front of the door -- Jake talking to OLIVER JAEGER, the postmaster, who has his pajamas on under an overcoat. He's about sixty with the boiled eyes of an alcoholic. He talks through the door.

JAKE

A parcel about so big. Brown paper. Felt pen.

JAEGER

I'm at a loss, Sir.

(opens the counter; leads
Jake through)

We handle a stupendous volume of mail, considering the population --

JAKE

Look, I'm going to bring in a facsimile parcel and put it in the post office where your employees can see it. But I have to ask you if you think by any slim chance, you or they might remember --

JAEGER

Mr. Pepper, it's Christmas.

EXT. ANDERSEN RANCH ENTRANCE - DAY

Jake's car travels along the well-kept gravel road between two lines of tall cottonwoods. Even in winter it's a beautiful stretch.

He follows the road to where it comes out of the trees and runs alongside the big pasture to the house. His headlights illuminate:

The house. A Hallmark Christmas card.

Jake stops the car in front of the house, looks down at the two coffins on the seat beside him.

Faintly we HEAR the SOUND of a CHRISTMAS CAROL from within.

Addie comes out of the house to see who this is. She beams when she recognizes Jake.

ADDIE

Well my goodness!

JAKE

Merry Christmas.

ADDIE

I was wondering if I'd ever see you again. Were you going to call me, ever?

JAKE

I always had it in my mind to.

She goes to take his arm. He lets himself be led.

ADDIE

(as they go)

Marylee's helping us whip up
some gourmet good. Probably
poison us all.

They move into the house.

INT. ANDERSEN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

General Christmas pandemonium with the kids SHRIEKING over
their gifts. Clem handing out presents, and the Christmas
music BLARING.

JOSIE

(over the music)

Mom, you got a card from Aunt
Denise.

Amy is pointing out a sweater to Clem.

AMY

If you had that in green you could
wear it with your corduroys.

IN THE KITCHEN AREA

Marylee and Tillie, already both pie-eyed. Marylee's cooking.
Finishing a stiff scotch. She's enjoying herself -- Addie
and Jake come in. There are cheerful greetings all around

MARYLEE

(to Jake)

You know, when my mama passed
away, my dad said he'd never marry
again -- but he did. But he was
sort of past the age of fooling
around, he needed to be taken care
of. You don't look like you need
to be taken care of.

JAKE

(a bit overwhelmed)

I do, tonight, ladies.

TILLIE

(slyly)

I hear a lot of women have a
thing for policemen. Is that true?

ADDIE

Yes. It is.

Suddenly Addie kisses him -- and the kiss is hotter than she'd expected. Like the taste of an illicit drug.

CLEM

(a huge grin)

Well, all right now!

Finally, they break apart. Addie points a finger above her head.

ADDIE

Mistletoe.

JOSIE

(calling to Clem)

Daddy, this isn't for Junior.
It's for you.

Josie is moving to Clem, waving a parcel about the size of a kleenex box. Tied with old twine.

ON CLEM

Trying to stay in charge of handing out presents and enjoying Jake's predicament.

CLEM

(taking the parcel)

Now who the devil's this from?

AMY

Addie, let's start setting this table. Tillie, empty the dishwasher.
(to Jake)

We heard a talk show the other night. Women were telling the darndest stories. Jake, come to the table.

Jake sits down. So does Clem, who removes the brown paper from the parcel, revealing a Woolworth's gift-box. He opens that and takes out something wrapped in more paper. He hands all these wrappings to Addie.

CLEM

Throw it in the garbage, will you, sugarpie.

TILLIE

(to Jake)

One woman said she'd deliberately get herself stopped by state troopers.

Clem examines what he's left with: a small box, carved from blonde wood.

CLEM

What's this, a music box?

He opens it -- and sees inside: a picture of himself -- a snapshot of himself, sitting in his jeep. Neatly trimmed to fit the box. He closes the box again, turning it over -- and reacts:

CLEM

Godalmighty! It's a damn coffin!

He hands the box to Amy who peeks inside.

Jake, unmoving, but in his eyes we see just how hard he's been hit.

AMY

(she doesn't get it)

That;s a nice picture of you,
Clem.

CLEM

Did you hear what I said --
it's a damn coffin.

(grabs it to show her)

Look at it -- that's what it is!

(to Jake)

Somebody's got a strange sense
of humor.

JAKE

Let me see that.

AMY

Clem, you're right. Oh, that's
sick.

ON JAKE

Holding the coffin. Looks around.

THE ANDERSEN FAMILY

They're staring at Jake. On the verge of picking up his alarm.

Jake's expression vanishes in a smile.

JAKE

Somebody's idea of a joke.

CUT TO:

A DICKENSIAN CHRISTMAS DINNER

Bountiful. Noisy.

The camera moves around wrapping us in a sense of this family. There is much BANTERING TALK, JOKES and LAUGHTER. Jake, however, is not a part of this. In their closeness and under the concentration of his gaze: every gesture seems full of menace.

Amy setting down steaming platters of greens and sweet potatoes.

Addie helping Josie cut up her turkey.

Marylee boxed draining glass.

Tillie quietly eating, wide-eyed.

Clem Jr. ladling cranberry sauce onto his plate.

All the kids animated, enjoying.

Clem sharpening the carving knife.

CLEM

God damn what a meal!
God damn!

ON JAKE'S EYES

Watching the children go off to toys and television; the women clearing dishes, except for Marylee, who is boxed, singing softly. Clem opening his belt a few notches, relieved, groaning.

CLEM

I'll tell you what. That was the best damn meal I've ever et.

JAKE

Pass me the sugar, please, Clem.

CLEM

(slides it over)
There ya go. Glad you're here.

As Jake smiles, puts a lot of sugar in his coffee, and starts it.

JAKE

Clem, there ever a homicide in Penasco?

CLEM

Not since I've been in the job, and that's been a long, long time.

JAKE

How long?

CLEM

Goin' on thirteen years, I guess.

MARYLEE

(too brightly)

What about Doctor Cale?

CLEM

He killed hisself, Marylee.

JAKE

When?

CLEM

It was October. I guess it was October ...

MARYLEE

Jimmy Cale was a shit, Mister Pepper. He was a loan shark, an abortionist and a shit. Good riddance to bad rubbish.

ADDIE

Marylee, pipe down.

MARYLEE

Don't tweet at me Addie.

CLEM

Anyways, he wasn't murdered.

MARYLEE

His wife says he was.

JAKE

Is that right, Clem?

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

Jake parks at the curb in front of a substantial brick house. Clem is in the seat alongside. They get out. The street is very quiet -- Christmas silence.

Jake walks up the path and onto the porch of the brick house. Clem follows uneasily.

CLEM

You know it's goddamn Christmas day.

Jake makes no reply. Clem rings the bell.

CLEM

Just don't be surprised by nothin'.

JAKE

Surprised?

CLEM

Roseanne's a morphine addict.

Jake looks at him.

CLEM

She's a beautiful woman. Jimmy hooked her on morphine. That's how he got her to marry him.

INT. CALE HOUSE - DAY

It's one creepy house. Cold. Icy-white curtains, heavily cutting out the light. Blood-dark mahogany furniture. White walls. A PRACTICAL NURSE leads Jake and Clem through the hall and up a staircase that's thickly carpeted.

They disappear out of sight. After a few moments, the nurse comes back down the stairs.

INT. MRS. CALE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Curtains always drawn, yet the room is not dim; it's just artificial light.

MRS. CALE, a beautiful woman with unhealthy pale skin, black hair and red lips and nails, sits propped up in a bed piled with lacy pillows.

Jake sits on the edge of a dressing table bench watching thoughtfully.

Clem is standing there looking at Jake.

MRS. CALE

His enemies were numberless as the stars, Mister Pepper, as uncounted as the spites in men's hearts. Shall I recite their names?

JAKE

No, that really won't be necessary, Mrs. Cale.

MRS. CALE

Do you like music, Mr. Pepper? Jimmy did. We used to talk about music. We talked about poetry and
(cont.)

MRS. CALE (cont.)
 painting and the arts. We used to
 read aloud to one another.

JAKE
 What makes you think he was
 murdered?

MRS. CALE
 I am the only witness to his
 death. It was here in this room.
 (gestures)
 Over there. He came in with a
 bottle of his maalox in his hand.
 One good gulp and down he went.
 His heart stopped. Yes. But what
made it stop?

Jake galnces at Clem.

MRS. CALE
 Chironex fleckeri, gentlemen.

Clem blinks uncomprehendingly.

JAKE
 The sea anemone.

MRS. CALE
 You know Latin, Mister Pepper.

Jake nods.

MRS. CALE
 And do you also know that the
 sea anemone's venom is the
 deadliest known? The deadliest
 in the world. A few drops of it
 will kill without trace within
 minutes. It's the perfect
 instrument of murder. It
 immediately paralyzes the vocal
 cords, and then the respiratory
 system and the victim dies slowly
 of suffocation. It's an utterly
 horrifying death.
 (a weary rolling of the eyes;
 Jimmy spoke of it constantly
 day after day.

JAKE
 Why was that, Mrs. Cale?

MRS. CALE
 He was planning to kill someone
 that way.

JAKE

Who?

MRS. CALE

Anyone. James was not an easygoing man.

JAKE

I guess not, Mrs. Cale.

CLEM

This sure is kind of you, Roseanne. I mean, seein' what today is.

MRS. CALE

Is it some special day, Clem?

CLEM

It's Christmas day, Roseanne.

MRS. CALE

Grace should have told me.

JAKE

(a little sharply, to bring her back)

Mrs. Cale.

She turns to him blankly.

JAKE

Did your husband ever mention to you that he'd been threatened in any way?

MRS. CALE

About a month before they killed him. He got a package in the mail. Inside was a small wooden coffin.

CLEM

(softly)

Jesus!

Mrs. Cale turns to look at him.

His mouth is open, unable to speak. As if the air had suddenly thinned too much for him to breathe.

MRS. CALE

He thought very little of it really. So did I. Someone being spiteful.

(turns back to Jake)

Though when I saw his picture there I knew. I felt a shadow had fallen.

EXT. THE CALE HOUSE - DAY

Jake and Clem are exiting the house. The moment the door shuts behind them:

CLEM
(fear edging toward
terror)

I'm next.

JAKE
Clem, think --

CLEM
I'm gonna be next. As God is
my witness, I don't know why.
(looks at Jake)
But I'm gonna be next.

Jake grabs him by the arm, jerking him around.

JAKE
Dammit, think! You're the sheriff.
You've been the sheriff here for
thirteen years! Now what the hell
is the connection between all
these people and you?

Clem is crying.

JAKE
Whoa.

CLEM
Christ. I don't want to die.

JAKE
Nothing's going to happen to
you. I promise you that.

Jake pulls open door to car -- leans in and picks up the mike.
Clem grabs his shotgun -- then sits down abruptly, the
shotgun across his knees.

JAKE
This is Federal 13 to Arapahoe
Control -- You still up over there?

SPEAKER
Control by Federal 13.

JAKE
Control, I'm overnight here with
Clem Andersen
(glances sideways at him)
in event of any messages.

SPEAKER

Ten four, Federal 13. Will copy.
You boys have a nice Christmas, now.

INT. FBI REGIONAL OFFICE - DAY

Field agents working out of desks in the central bull pen. We see Jake arguing with Weis in a glass-walled office to one side -- and pacing so furiously you feel he could slam right through a wall.

INT. SPECIAL AGENT WEIS' OFFICE - DAY

WEIS

I think you've lost your mind, Jake. You've interviewed witnesses, made a search of a crime scene and confiscated evidence, all with authorization, and now you want help in compounding this mess?

JAKE

Andersen's invited us in, for Christ's sake!

WEIS

But not in writing.

JAKE

I'll get it in writing!

EXT. THE ANDERSEN HOUSE - DAY

First light. The spotlights that light up the yard around the house and the outbuildings are just going out.

EXT. BLUE RIVER DIVERSION DAM - DAY

Clem is alone, but with his deer rifle at the ready; staring down at the Blue River, extremely thoughtful. He appears to make up his mind about something, turns, gets into his jeep, drives away.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Beautiful winter afternoon. Clem is rolling along the highway in his jeep, the wind whipping his hair. He's on radio calling for Jake.

CLEM

Loreen, track down Jake Pepper
and tell him to call me at the
house. It's important, tell him,
it's about the river.

He swings the jeep onto his road -- stops just one inch from
the gate.

He hops out. Opens the gate. Drives through. Goes back and
closes the gate.

Stops. Looks at his land with pride. He goes over and turns
off the radio. Listens. HEARS a MEADOWLARK -- and WHISTLES
back to it.

He gets in the jeep and drives on.

EXT. THE ALLEY - DAY

Dappling sunlight flows like creek water over Clem as the
jeep rolls along the alley. Like a trout in a stream.

ANOTHER ANGLE

The alley stretches ahead. The light is tricky.

ON CLEM'S FACE

Smiling, pleased with the day. Then his eyes focus -- in terror.

ACROSS THE ROAD AHEAD - A STEEL WIRE

Taut, silvery. Right there.

ANOTHER ANGLE

There's a terrible TWANGING SOUND. Something round and ...
flies through a screen of brush. There's a HEAVY CRASH as
the jeep swerves into a tree.

The round thing rolls down a slope out of sight. As the ...
on the jeep begins to SOUND.

EXT. ANDERSEN RANCH YARD AND HOUSE - DAY

The horn is BLARING in the distance. Amy comes out of the
house, drawn by the sound. She stands on the porch. She listens/
Clem Jr. comes out of the garage and listens too.

CLEM JR.

That's Dad's horn.

AMY
Well, I wish he'd cut it out.

They wait.

AMY
It's stuck. Go on down.

Clem Jr. climbs onto his motorbike. Before he starts out, Amy HONKS TWICE on the horn on Clem Jr.'s bike.

CLEM JR.
It's shorted on him.

He rides off.

EXT. RANCH ROAD - DAY

SOUND OF THE MOTORBIKE getting louder in the distance. Then Clem Jr. comes around a turn, speeds toward us down the alley. He brakes abruptly. He jumps off the bike, lets it fall.

REVERSE ON

The jeep has run off the road into a pair of trees -- tilting down. Bushes screen what's in the driver's seat.

CLEM JR.
(running up)
Dad! Hey Dad!

He jumps down to the jeep -- and SCREAMS.

ANGLE ON JEEP

Clem's body lies against the horn. The body has no head.

EXT. PENASCO R.C. CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

All white clapboard. Cars line the street outside, including police and state trooper vehicles.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The church is filled with NEIGHBORS, including Jake and Addie, all of Clem's family.

Clem's casket surrounded by flowers, lies at the foot of the altar. The casket is closed.

A LOCAL PRIEST intones a prayer over the casket.

PRIEST

"A dawning light from on high
will visit us to shine upon those
who are in darkness and entering
the shadowland of death. I am
the resurrection and the life."

JAKE

Staring at the casket. His lips begin moving ever so slightly as he reflexively, inaudibly; in perfect unison, recites the prayer of the priest.

ADDIE

Stares at him, moved. Puzzled.

INT. STARLITE MOTEL - DUSK

The door of a room SLAMS open. Jake strides in -- followed by AGENT BASKIN carrying his suitcases, clothes, boxes of books.

JAKE

Right in here, Baskin. Just
dump it anywhere. I want to
get to work.

INT. WEIS' OFFICE - DUSK

Weis on the phone to Jake. They're in the midst of a furious argument.

JAKE (o.s.)

Hell, we waive jurisdiction all
the time! I'm not leaving the
killer to dance on his grave.

WEIS

(calmly)

I don't care, Jake. You didn't
get his request in writing ...

ANGLE ON JAKE

JAKE

Okay, Marion, his head was on
the road -- the road is the locus
in quo -- and the road is federal
property -- and that's our
jurisdiction.

ANGLE ON WEIS

WEIS

Jake, I think you've lost your
mind. Now get your asses back
here! Okay?

EXT. MOTEL ROOM - DUSK

Jake has brought the phone out onto the "terrace" and it's cold. Behind him, in the lighted room, we see Baskin watching him.

JAKE

Shaking on the cold terrace. A pause. Then:

JAKE
(low)

Okay.

Jake hangs up, looks into the room at Baskin. Baskin holds his hands up questioningly. Jake shakes his head. Baskin just sits there unmoving. Then he pulls on his hat, coat, and leaves. The door closes. Jake carries the phone back into the motel room.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DUSK

Outside: through the window, a blazing cold sunset over Penasco, illuminating the drabness of the room.

Inside: a panorama of work and frustration. On the wall, a clipboard, full with torn-out ads for snake farms. Photos of the Emmons, the Hoskins, Dr. Cale and Clem, are taped to the wall. There are boxes of files. Computer print-out. Books on snakes. Camera magazines. Photo paper samples, etc.

He takes down the clipboard, frustrated, studies it a while, then slaps it down, looks out the window, watching the ball of the sun slip below the horizon.

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Jake comes out of the lighted office with some ice cubes in a plastic bucket. He walks across the big empty lot -- past the illuminated swimming pool in its eerie plastic tent. Past the kiddies' playground. As half under his breath:

JAKE
(singing)

'I get no kick from cocaine, mere
alcohol doesn't thrill me at all ..."
(humming the rest)

As he takes out his key, he goes to the door of his room and seems oppressed at having to enter it. Unlocks door.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

The door opens. Jake is illuminated against the light outside. He comes in and closes the door behind him.

There's faint light now through the curtains of a big window (from a spotlight outside). Jake takes off his shirt, takes out a cigarette, lights it.

Something moves behind him.

Two bare arms close around his neck.

He turns his head. It's Addie behind him, naked.

They look each other in the eyes.

Jake's arms come up around her and he pulls her to him.

They embrace and hold each other tightly.

ADDIE

(whisper)

I'm yours forever and a day.

AT WINDOW - LATER

Addie is standing at the window, the curtains drawn back. The shadows of snowflakes flow down her face like tears. She turns back into the room. Only the glowing end of Addie's cigarette provides any definite illumination. She is watching Jake sleep.

He suddenly wakes incoherently. It takes a moment for him to reassemble reality. He looks at Addie almost as though he doesn't recognize her.

ADDIE

(quietly)

You've been dreaming.

JAKE

Oh gentle Jesus, take me not.

ADDIE

A nightmare?

JAKE

Addie ...

ADDIE

Yes, Jake.

JAKE

What connection might there be between Clem, the Emmons, the Hoskins and Dr. Cale that might have something to do with a river?

ADDIE

Is that what you're looking for?

JAKE

Yes.

ADDIE

I don't know. Nothing really.

Jake scrutinizes her intensely.

Addie catches the look.

ADDIE

I mean, nothing of any consequence. It's trivial.

Jake keeps staring at her silently. Finally:

ADDIE

Well, Clem and Claude and Jimmy Cale were all on the river committee.

JAKE

What's that?

ADDIE

It was nothing.

Jake reaches for and lights a cigarette. He doesn't want Addie to pick up his alarm.

JAKE

What is it?

ADDIE

Oh, it's history, Jake. It was six or seven years ago.

JAKE

What river?

ADDIE

Blue River. It belongs to Bob.

JAKE

Bob who?

ADDIE
Bob Quinn.

JAKE
Addie ...

ADDIE
Yes, Jake.

JAKE
Let's go eat breakfast together.

ADDIE
(a small laugh)
I'd lose my job. I can't.

JAKE
Good. I want you to take me for
a ride. There's something I want
you to show me.

EXT. ADDIE ON HORSEBACK - DAY

Clambering up a steep trail -- dust drifting around her. The trail curls up a hillside, offering an ever-widening view of the valley.

Addie looks around at Jake, who's coming up behind her. His horse skittering on loose footing. Shards of rock spewing out from under the horses' hooves.

ADDIE
Lean forward more. Hang onto
her mane.

JAKE

Grabbing hold as his horse climbs the very steep slope.

ON JAKE AND ADDIE

They come to a small plateau and rein in their horses to give them a chance to rest. Jake, taking in a great draught of fresh air, looks around, then looks back down the way they came. Surprised at the height and distance.

JAKE
That's all your ranch, down
there?

THEIR POV

Below, very far and small, we see the buildings of Addie's ranch. Dots. Tiny insect figures. An overbearing sense of man's smallness and fragility in the vastness of the land.

ADDIE

What there's left of it. It's
only a few hundred acres. It's
not very big for this country.
We don't own the sunset.

(a beat)

Some people own the sunset and
the sunrise as well.

She sets her horse to moving again.

Jake shifting his buttocks from side to side to ease the
soreness from the ride.

EXT. CONTINUING UP THE TRAIL - VARIOUS SHOTS - DAY

They continue up and up, the steep slopes falling away hundreds
of feet below them.

The horses all lathered.

EXT. TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN - DAY

The horses and riders climb one final grade, the horizon falling
behind them, so that they seem to be riding at the very top of
the world.

When they reach the top, Addie reins in her horse. Jake stops
beside her. Here it is quiet except for a light breeze. There
is only the panting and snorting of the horses.

ADDIE

There's Blue River.

THE PANORAMA BEFORE THEM

They're looking down over tens of thousands of acres of land
-- foothills and valleys, rangeland and haymeadows, forests
and distant mountains. A glistening river winds through it all.

Addie slips to the ground with a slow easy motion. She pets
the horse.

ADDIE (cont.)

You see where the river makes that
second bend? That's where it enters
Bob Quinn's place. The B.Q. Ranch.
It's so big ... the town is just --
a speck. The town was just one of the
loading depots for the B.Q.

JAKE

I imagine, if you lived on that ranch. That town would seem ... insignificant.

THE LANDSCAPE

The sun is brilliant on the distant loops of the river.

ADDIE (over)

And the way he sees it, that's his river.

JAKE

Taking it all in as a herd of antelope swarms across low hills -- hundreds of specks moving in the distance.

ADDIE

Everything you see -- and beyond, over the horizon. He owns it all.

The herd shifts as a dot, a horse and rider pass.

ADDIE

That's him ...

A moving point of blackness in the dazzling enormity of the landscape.

ADDIE

Robert Hawley Quinn.

EXT. THE RIVER - DAY

Jake and Addie edge out on a sandbar. Here the water is louder, overwhelming, and the river seems vast. Addie whacks the horses' rumps and they lunge into the river. Addie whispering encouragement as the water deepens.

Jake is all concentration for a moment. Heavy furrows of water roll over his arms and legs. He feels the wildness and power of the river.

The opposite shore rears up suddenly against the sky. In a moment they are on a narrow strip of sandy river beach, Jake looking a bit bedraggled.

ADDIE

(laughs)

You're baptized now. You're a cowboy. How does it feel?

JAKE

Net.

ADDIE

(laughs, looks around)
I love this damn river, Jake.

JAKE

It's more powerful than it looks.

ADDIE

The idea of it is powerful.

Jake looks at her questioningly.

ADDIE

The farmers up country have been fighting Bob Quinn for twenty years for this river's water. Well, in seventy-nine we had a real bad drought. And our little insignificant committee, which met maybe six times -- we just settled it. The farmers got their water, and Bob lost the lion's share.

(indicating)

Down there ... about twenty miles back, upriver, we put in a diversion dam. Bob must have been absolutely astonished. He didn't even come to our hearings. He sent his lawyers. He probably thought his friends in the statehouse would overrule us. But they didn't. It was too popular. They wanted the votes.

EXT. RIDE DOWN INTO THE B.Q. RANCH - DAY

The land like a great swelling ocean of grass rippling in the wind.

ADDIE

Reins in her horse, looking at something ahead.

EXT. BQ RANCH HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Big barns, bunkhouses, machine shops, corrals, stables.

ADDIE AND JAKE

Walking their horses forward.

A HORSE'S HOOVES

Cantering in soft earth and sawdust.

EXT. SHOW RING - DAY

The cantering horse and its rider swing along the perimeter of the ring.

Addie walks up to the ring. Jake behind her.

Their horses are tethered to a post nearby.

Addie leans on the rail of the ring and watches.

THE RIDER

JUANITA QUINN

She slows the horse from a canter to a walk and comes up to the fence.

AT THE FENCE

Juanita just looks at Addie and Jake.

ADDIE

(in Spanish)

Hi, Juanita. Is Bob around?

JUANITA

(replies in Spanish)

He's left for Shafer, I think.

Juanita looks as if she's going to move off again.

ADDIE

Juanita, you remember Jake Pepper.

JUANITA

Yes.

And with that she just rides away.

JAKE AND ADDIE, RIDING

Away from the headquarters. Jake looks around -- as if he could read something in what he sees.

ADDIE

That's his horse.

ANGLE ON HOT WALKING MACHINE - A WHITE STALLION

A quarter horse -- a working horse -- but a beauty, and huge -- more than 17 hands high. He is of a whiteness that almost hurts the eyes.

ADDIE (over)
His name is Brujo. It means
Sorcerer in Spanish.

The big horse snorts and stamps.

JAKE (over)
And how has the diversion
affected the B.Q.?

ADDIE
It hasn't affected it at all.
The diversion just siphoned
off a trickle.

JAKE
Then why did Quinn oppose it?

ADDIE
I don't know. That's just Bob.
One day a man in the Okay Cafe
got to arguing with him and poking
him in the chest. He did it once,
twice, and then the third time
Bob bit off his finger. Bob put
it in his pocket, drove the man
to a doctor and had him sew the
finger back on. The man's loved
Bob ever since.

She laughs ruefully, shaking her head.

JAKE

Amazed; unable to react for a moment.

JAKE
You know him well?

ADDIE
All my life.

JAKE
How many people were on that
committee?

ADDIE
Seven. Sharon Medaris and Van
Robinson died of old age.

JAKE
That's six. Who's the seventh?

ADDIE
Me.

EXT. PAY PHONE BOOTH MOTEL --DAY

Jake on the phone. He opens a notebook which is fat with writing. His hands are shaking -- but from the cold or anticipation -- it's hard to tell. But he's spilling steaming hot coffee over his hands as he talks.

JAKE

(into phone)

I just hit the courthouse and I've got date of birth, social security -- you name it -- but I want to impress upon you first and foremost that discretion is paramount. Paramount, Sid.

BASKIN'S VOICE (o.s.)

I understand you. What's his name?

JAKE

Robert Hawley Quinn.

From the other end of the line we HEAR 'a LOW WHISTLE OF AMAZEMENT. The whistle carries a slight REVERB.

JAKE

Have you got me on the speakerphone, Sid?

BASKIN (o.s.)

(a beat)

No ...

WEIS' VOICE (o.s.)

(interjecting)

What nut gave you Bob Quinn's name?

JAKE

Thanks, Baskin. You miserable Mormon son-of-a-bitch.

BASKIN (o.s.)

Sorry.

WEIS (o.s.)

Listen, Jake ...

JAKE

I'm listening, Marion.

ANGLE ON WEIS

WEIS

I'm kind of bewildered here, Jake.

JAKE (o.s.)

That so?

WEIS

That's right. Because unlike most of the cowboys in this outfit, you've always understood the futility of dead end cases that are totally lacking in prosecutive merit. You hear those words, Jake? "Prosecutive merit." You've always been able -- at least up to now -- to look beyond the arrest and anticipate the courtroom situation.

ANGLE ON JAKE

JAKE

That's exactly why I'm here.

WEIS (o.s.)

I want you to move on, Jake. You've lost all perspective on this one.

JAKE

(after a pause)

You close this case -- and I'll take it to the papers myself.

WEIS (o.s.)

You wouldn't do that.

ANGLE ON WEIS

JAKE (o.s.)

The hell I wouldn't.

WEIS

Come home, Jake. You have nothing. Except the opinion of an old maid schoolteacher. That's how the lawyers will put it. When Bob Quinn sues the shit out of us for unjustified search and seizure.

(a beat)

I wouldn't even ask Judge Hoffman for a warrant. I couldn't keep a straight face. No warrant, Jake. No personnel. No expenses. No warrant.

ANGLE ON JAKE

JAKE

I'll tell you one warrant you just signed. Addie Mason's death warrant.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Cozy. Addie in a soft dress. Fresh-scrubbed kids in bright winter colors. The kids and Addie are all sitting in tiny chairs for a reading session. DANCY, a girl, is reading.

DANCY

(from book)

'Where -- did -- she -- go --
asked -- Susan?

Addie is staring at them. She is not very happy but she is in perfect control.

EXT.. POST OFFICE - DUSK

Jake's car is parked out front.

INT. OLIVER JAEGER'S OFFICE - DUSK

Oliver Jaeger sits in a recliner. Jake sits on a spindly mail cart. The room is tidy, cheerless. Overheated. On Jaeger's desk is a stack of old copies of "Ideals."

JAKE

I'm going to give you a telephone number. Call me night or day if anybody -- I mean anybody -- from the B.Q. Ranch comes in with a parcel that size.

Jake scribbles the number on a card. Jaeger just watches him, hands folded. Jake practically has to stick the card in his hand.

JAKE

And, I'm going to ask you to keep this confidential. For your own safety.

JAEGER

I don't believe a word of what you've told me, Mr. Pepper.

JAKE

Why not?

JAEGER

I just don't believe it.

(gets up)

But I don't think you'd be interested in my reasons.
Good day to you, Sir.

JAKE

Mr. Jaeger --

JAEGER

I don't even want to talk
about this. You mind letting
yourself out?

Jake hesitates. Then goes out the door.

EXT. POST OFFICE - DUSK

Jake gets into his car and drives away. Jaeger sits inside
the office, looking after him. Finally Jaeger gets up to leave.

JAKE'S VOICE (o.s.)

Oliver Jaeger is Bob Quinn's cousin!!

INT. ADDIE'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Jake is in the process of taking off his coat -- and he's
stopped.

MARYLEE

Everybody knows that. My lord, my
lord. What'd you tell Oliver?

JAKE

Apparently too much.

ADDIE

It'll be all over town by morning.

Jake isn't going to take off his coat after all.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - MORNING

Monday morning. Addie comes into the schoolyard from the
parking lot. Two little boys spot her and run up to her.
They tag along with her. ERIC and his PAL.

ERIC

Miss Mason, Ma'am --

ADDIE

Hello, Eric. Did you make any
New Year's resolutions?

ERIC

Miss Mason, you know what? My
daddy told my mommy somebody's
sending people coffins. Like for
the graveyard. Said Mr. Quinn sent
them.

ADDIE

Receiving this news. Finally finding her smile:

ADDIE

Oh, Eric! Your daddy was just teasing your mama.

They go in the school doors.

ADDIE

Telling her fairy tales.

The SCHOOL BELL BEGINS TO RING.

INT. "OKAY CAFE" - MORNING

Monday morning. Jake comes in for breakfast -- and finds the cafe is packed with men. BUSINESSMEN, FARMERS, RANCHERS -- Oliver Jaeger. D.A. Bill Waugh.

Jake walks to a booth. It's empty. The only empty booth in the place. The waitress comes up and hands him a menu.

WAITRESS

How are you today?

Jake studies the menu.

JAKE

Two fried eggs. Toast. Coffee.

WAITRESS

That's number one, is that right?

Jake hands her back the menu. She moves away.

Jake can overhear most of the jokes -- mostly tongue-in-cheek cracks like:

RANCHER

Goes to show, you can know a fella for years and not know the first thing about him.

SECOND RANCHER

Bob and I went pheasant hunting last year. I had no idea I was taking my life in my hands.

THIRD RANCHER

Ol' Bob's an Aggie, isn't he. They're mean mothers!

The cafe door opens. And there's silence.

ROBERT HAWLEY QUINN

Standing in the doorway. A big man -- middle to late fifties -- thick pewter-gray hair, Indian straight. A length not popular with his fellow ranchers, who look as though they visit the barber every Saturday. Evenly tanned skin that's lined but unmottled with age, that accentuates the paleness of his eyes behind rimless spectacles. A type uncommon today; groping around you might decide that some Lutheran warlord of the Seventeenth Century could have looked like this -- supremely confident of his own election to grace -- and of the strength of his arm.

He doesn't even hesitate in the doorway -- it just seems that way.

The cafe erupts with greetings: "Hiya, Bob! Hey, Bob, come over here!" Hands reaching out.

Quinn reacts to this without surprise -- no more than a glitter of amusement behind the glasses. He moves unhurriedly toward Bill Waugh, the D.A. and Oliver Jaeger, but he quietly acknowledges greetings along the way.

JAKE

Watching Quinn. Watching the others. Curious.

BILL WAUGH
(loudly)

Hey, Jake?

ANOTHER ANGLE

The D.A. has gotten up, is coming toward Jake. With Quinn behind him:

BILL WAUGH
Bob, this is Jake Pepper. From
the Bureau.

Jake stands up. Relaxed, but alert.

BILL WAUGH
Jake, I'd like you to meet Bob
Quinn.

Jake sticks out his hand -- and Quinn takes it easily, and shakes. While the D.A. moves away, exchanging looks with Oliver Jaeger and his buddies.

QUINN

A genial smile and voice.

QUINN

I hear you're a chess player.

JAKE

Yes, I play chess.

QUINN

I don't find many games around here. How about us getting together?

JAKE

I'd like that.

QUINN

What about this evening? Come by around five. We'll have a drink and play a couple of games.

EXT. NEAR THE ENTRANCE TO THE QUINN RANCH - LATE AFTERNOON

POV from Jake's car. We see a taut six-strand barbed-wire game fence running parallel to the road. It stretches ahead to a gateway. A YOUNG GIRL is waiting.

The gateway consists of two high pine logs of immense girth planted upright on either side of a swing gate. From a cross-piece hangs a wooden sign with a pair of crossed tomahawks, and in well-cut letters, the words:

B.Q. RANCH
R.H. QUINN
PROPRIETOR

At the entrance, the young girl opens the gate and waves for Jake to stop.

YOUNG GIRL

Afternoon! I'm Nancy Quinn.
My dad sent me to meet you.

JAKE

Well, thank you.

On closer view we see she's a cheerful twelve-year-old tomboy, her tawny hair cropped short, and she is splashed with freckles. One of her forearms is wrapped in a dirty bandage.

JAKE (over)

Hurt yourself?

NANCY

Naw. Well, I got throwed.

JAKE

Thrown?

NANCY

Brujo threw me. He's one mean horse. He's thrown every guy on the ranch except dad. I said well I bet I can ride him now. And I did. For about two seconds, flat.

EXT. ROAD THROUGH QUINN RANCH - VARIOUS SHOTS - DUSK

The road seems to go on forever, but we quickly recognize the: Silhouettes of big sheds, hay barns. Corrals.

EXT. THE CAR - JAKE - MOVING

Jake's car crosses a wooden bridge that spans Blue River. Nancy, on horseback, canters alongside. We can HEAR beneath the bridge, the river -- a SOFT, SLOW CHURNING ROAR.

EXT. MAIN HOUSE - QUINN RANCH - DUSK

The house is darkening. Fast becoming a silhouette: two stories tall, ghost of a white veranda, a silver crescent of gravel in front of the house that CRUNCHES sweetly as Jake's car rolls to a stop.

EXT. MAIN HOUSE - DUSK

It takes a moment to see that Quinn is standing by the front door. The upper part of his body in shadow, his legs and bare feet in light.

CLOSE ON QUINN

Eyes watching.

JAKE

Gets out of the car. Nancy pulls her horse around.

JAKE

You're not coming in? .

NANCY

My dad don't like anybody around when he plays chess.

JAKE
Well thanks again.

NANCY
My pleasure.

The lights go on, lighting up the front porch. Quinn opens the front door, comes out and down the steps. He is wearing only an old bathrobe. He doesn't hurry. He waits 'till Jake is quite close before he speaks.

QUINN
The city slicker come to skin
a country boy.

Smiles. Leads Jake toward the door.

QUINN
(as they go)
I think it's going to snow
tonight, Jake. It won't stick,
though. It's only a dream.

INT. MAIN HOUSE - NIGHT

Jake stands in the foyer -- a wide hall -- looking around as he takes off his coat. Quinn stands easily, watching him. Jake hangs his coat on a rack, with others. He follows Quinn down a hall.

The house is fair-sized, grown out of an old adobe house. But the sense of its difference is subtle. It's not grandiose or deluxe; it's even rather drab -- masculine in the sense that a man made all the decisions, always in favor of good materials, long-lasting construction, and deep colors. There are many Indian things.

Jake stops to look at a portrait: a slightly stiff, very ... oil painting of a Mexican hidalgo. Circa 1880.

QUINN
That's my wife's great-great-grandfather. He was a national hero in Mexico. He owned half the state of Chihuahua.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Juanita is there.

Jake and Quinn enter.

Jake has been assessing the room and its contents. There are many framed old photographs -- beautiful, fierce and handsome Indian faces. And large blowups of Juanita barrel racing and of the river. Several dogs have the run of the house.

Quinn, meantime, goes to a huge fireplace, throws on more logs.

Everywhere around him, stuffed big game animals loom up and peer out of the shadows, brooding and ironic.

QUINN

It just dropped into the twenties.

JUANITA

(to Jake)

Let me guess: straight whiskey.

JAKE

Straight scotch.

JUANITA

(shrugging, pouring it)

I was correct.

JAKE

In essence.

She sees Jake staring at a stunning photo of the river.

JUANITA

Bob takes them himself.

(pouring tequila)

I will join you. A tequila sunrise. Do you ever drink tequila, Jake?

Totally distracted, Jake nods.

JUANITA

Then I will tell you how you drink it, Jake. Straight. No lime, so salt. Straight.

JAKE

Yes, that's right.

JUANITA

I know. That is how a man drinks it.

QUINN

Are you ready to whip my ass?

JAKE

Sure.

QUINN

You know, the ancient Chinese had a game like chess; only at the beginning, they threw the pieces on the board, and wherever they fell was where they started.

JUANITA

(handing Jake his drink)

I'm going for a ride. Chess is a boring game.

As she starts to leave:

QUINN

(courteously)

Put on that down jacket.

JUANITA

I will.

JAKE

(to Quinn)

I like your house.

QUINN

It's too big for us, Jake.
Too big. Too cold.

Jake hangs his jacket on the back of a chair -- one of two facing each other across a chessboard. It's a simple, classical board. Pieces carved from boxwood. A lamp adjusts to cast light on the board. Two comfortable chairs. Quinn picks up two pawns.

QUINN

Dollar a game?

JAKE

Sounds good.

Quinn puts his hands behind his back.

JAKE

Right hand.

Quinn brings out the white pawn -- and hands it to Jake, then turns the board so that the white faces Jake. Jake makes a standard move -- pawn to king's 4.

QUINN

The first time you play with somebody -- it's not all that interesting, for my money.

(moves; pawn to king 4)

It's just gathering information. Trying to get a handle on the other man's style.

JAKE

That's half the fun, if you ask me.

(a beat)

Since you heard so much about me -- I'm surprised you don't know my style already.

QUINN

But you don't know mine, yet.

(a beat)

I don't think you do, Jake.

(a beat)

That's when it gets interesting. When you think you've got a handle on a man's style. When he has the capacity to surprise you.

CENTER OF THE LIVING ROOM - LATER

The shadows of the chess players tremble against the firelight. We see Quinn's shadow rise up -- then back off into the dark.

AT THE CHESSBOARD

Quinn emerges back into the light, holding a big log. He has huge hands. For a moment he stands in the red glow of the fire.

JAKE

Watching him.

JAKE

You get into town much, Bob?

QUINN

Looks at Jake. Smiles -- a strange, brilliant smile.

JAKE

It is as if something from another world suddenly washed him with fear.

QUINN

Throws the log on the fire. He straightens up. Comes back -- and moves a bishop on the board.

QUINN (over)

No, I never go into town, Jake.
Not if I can help it. I don't
care for that type of person. Sit on
their butts all day and worry about
their bowels or how they're gonna
make another nickel. They're always
scared of something. It makes me
sick to be around that.

(picks up Jake's glass and
his own)

But you pay a penalty, Jake. For
keeping yourself apart.

(goes to bar)

My mother's people were Indians.
Beautiful people, altogether clean
and straight. She had it in her
head that the greatest good a man
could do was to not leave a scar
on the land.

(pauses)

To let their journey through this
world be nothing more than a gesture
in the air or the water.

Jake looks up from the board, intrigued, surprised and affected.
Then:

QUINN

Your move.

He brings the drink back to Jake and hands it to him.

JAKE

What do you think of Addie Mason?

QUINN

You know that girl's father was a
dangerous psychotic? One night when
Addie was just a little girl, Vernon
came home -- and there was a light
coming through the window onto the
porch -- and all the fingers of her
daddy's left hand were lying there
-- Vernon had cut them off with a
hatchet.

(sips his drink)

You wouldn't think, would you, that

(cont.)

QUINN (cont.)

a picture like that exists in Addie Mason's head. But that's a true story, Jake.

(sips)

That's the only kind of story I can listen to.

Jake moves a piece.

QUINN

A loud laugh like an eruption of gunfire.

QUINN

Sonofagun. Thought I had you trapped. But it's hot beer and horse piss for me, Jake.

EXT. HIGHWAY BORDERING BLUE RIVER -- VERY EARLY MORNING

Jake's car pulls up, lurches to a stop. He gets out, pale and unshaven. We follow him down the sloping river bank to a spit of gravel. In the river we see Addie's dog, Pilgrim. Then Addie fishing. She wears waders and is standing hip-deep in the water. Here the river is clear and fast and not more than fifty yards wide. It is quiet except for the soft whirr of Addie's line snaking through the air. It leads us to Jake approaching on the opposite shore.

ADDIE

You know what I used to like about fishing -- was that when I was fishing, after a while I wasn't thinking about anything but fishing -- now I'm thinking about everything but fishing.

Jake nods. Addie turns back to the river, whipping out her line in another graceful arc.

ADDIE

You saw him? You talked to him?

JAKE

(lights a cigarette)

I know it's him.

(a look from Addie)

Just Bob? Hell, he is unique.

I'll give you that.

(draws deeply)

Crazy? Who knows?

(exhales; cont.)

JAKE (cont.)

I don't think he's crazy enough
to confess -- and without that,
right now I'll be damned if I
know how I could prove this.

There is a moment of full silence with only-the RIVER SOUNDS
as they face each other across the water.

ADDIE

What if you caught him in the act?

Jake stops smoking.

JAKE

Let's not even talk about that.

ADDIE

I'm serious.

JAKE

I know you are.

(beat)

How long's it been since you
fired a gun?

EXT. UPSTREAM - EARLY MORNING

Quinn slips off his horse with a slow easy motion. He kneels
down, scoops water into his face. Drinks deeply -- then,
dropping his clothing. He takes handfuls of sand from the
river margin and begins scrubbing himself. His muscles tense
against the cold of the water.

EXT. SANDHILLS - MORNING

The hills have been quarried, leaving white faces. Jake and
Addie are standing in a sort of a hollow. Addie's trying to
accustom herself to an army-issue .45, but it's very heavy.
Jake is setting up a variety of cans and bottles.

JAKE

I've got two boxes of ammo out
in the car. I want you to get
used to this gun.

ADDIE

Jake, I know how to fire a gun.

JAKE

Fine -- but it's got to be one
that has stopping power. You've
never had to kill a man.

ADDIE

Have you?

She raises the gun into position.

FIRES

THE NOISE IS TERRIFIC. The neck of the first bottle perfectly disintegrates. Jake is surprised as hell.

INT. JAKE'S OFFICE - LATER THAT DAY

Jake flings a bulging briefcase on his desk, and he's handing notes to a LADY DEPUTY SECRETARY.

JAKE

Cancel that pretrial in Tucumcari.
I'm going back to Penasco tonight.

There's a KNOCK on the door. Weis comes in.

WEIS

(pleasantly)
Hello, stranger.

JAKE

Come in -- I was just going to
write you a note.
(to lady deputy)
Get us some coffee, Lillian,
please.

The lady deputy gets up.

LADY DEPUTY

I don't do that, Jake. But as
long as I'm getting some for
myself -- I'll bring you and
Mr. Weis some too.

Jake looks at her blankly as she goes out. Weis sits on his desk. He looks at Jake.

JAKE

Okay, Marion, I'm back. Home.
What do you want?

WEIS

I just wonder, Jake, what you're
doing down there. In general.

JAKE

(controlling himself)
Nothin' much, Marion. I'm just trying
to solve the biggest mass murder case
this state ever had.

WEIS

Is that what you call it?

JAKE

Yes. And I've got a prime suspect under surveillance.

The lady deputy comes back with their coffees. They wait for her to leave, then:

WEIS

You sent those coffins and their wrappings to our lab, didn't you, Jake? You hurt some local feelings there.

JAKE

I wanted to doublecheck -- waste of time anyhow -- he's too smart to leave fingerprints.

WEIS

I have to tell you -- it wouldn't matter if he had.

JAKE

Run that by me again, please.

WEIS

Sure, Jake. There's no law against sending an implied threat through the mails. Much less identifying a perpetrator in those alleged homicides --

JAKE

(with rising anger)

Alleged! Is that the word you're using now, Marion? ALLEGED!

Weis covers both of his ears with his hands, then slowly:

WEIS

(lowering his hands)

Before you came in here, I promised myself I wouldn't listen to anymore of this.

JAKE

Quinn's the killer.

WEIS

You believe that. You don't know it.

JAKE

I know it.

After a pause.

WEIS

Jake -- we're asking for your
resignation from the Bureau.

Jake just looks at him.

JAKE

He's not sane, you know.

WEIS

Are you?

JAKE

I bet old Bob didn't even have
to call you, did he?

Weis slowly raises his hands again to cover his ears.

EXT. THE RIVER AT QUINN'S RANCH - EARLY EVENING

The water molten gold with the late sun.

QUINN'S VOICE

Here I am.

Jake looks around -- and makes out a darker figure against
the paling gold of the river. Jake walks in that direction.
Quinn is sitting there upright like an old Indian.

QUINN

I'm just listening to my river.
Sahh. Listen to it.

Jake doesn't move -- and the BABBLE of the river does seem
to rise like almost intelligible voices.

JAKE

What does it say, Bob?

QUINN

Hell, I don't know. It's like all
the voices in the world talkin' at
once. Maybe it's confused, is all.

ANGLE ON QUINN

Gazing downward -- perhaps at the river. Or perhaps -- it would
need only a motion of his pupils -- at the photos Jake is
laying out beside him.

JAKE

What confuses me, Bob, is that in every case the modus operandi is different.

Quinn lifts his head and sniffs the air like an animal. Then he pulls his poncho more tightly around himself and turns back toward the house.

JAKE

(following)

So of course there are people who contend that in each case the perpetrator is different. What do you think of that theory, Bob?

QUINN

(laughing as he goes off)

What's that joke -- about the woman they take off a train and blindfold her and she's raped by sixteen Chinamen -- and when they're arrested ... how does that go?

Jake stops walking.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACK COUNTRY NEAR BROWNSVILLE - DAY

Flat, murderously hot -- and weird. Hallucinatory subtropics: we're deep into Mexico even if this is called Texas.

JAKE

He just laughed it off, Dave. It was like those photos didn't exist. I thought I could jar him into some kind of response but he only laughed and told me a dirty joke.

Jake's car comes along the highway fast. Addie is also in the car. It is so hot that she is stripped down to a halter suntop and shorts. Now we see there is Bledsoe, the Fish and Wildlife Agent, in the back seat. He's giving directions. Motions them to turn off onto another highway.

BLEDSON

It's pretty far below the border. That's why it took so long to find.

INT. JAKE'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Bledsoe is trying to impress Addie.

BLEDSON

These guys smuggling dope, they love to find a shipment of snakes. Or they put a live snake in with a shipment to guard it. So the DEA keeps their eye on these places.

JAKE

You didn't say on the phone the truck had Mexican plates.

ADDIE

Did they say why they wanted the snakes?

BLEDSON

For a religious ceremony! How about that! Well, this could be a wild goose chase, Jake.

EXT. HIGHWAY AND SIDE ROAD - DAY

The car turns off the highway onto an unmarked secondary road.

EXT. SNAKE FARM - DAY

There's an adobe house with a screened porch. There are feathery pepper trees. There's a big wooden shed -- and various wooden 'cages.' No signs. No notices.

Jake's car pulls into the yard, raising a cloud of dust. They all get out. The dust begins to settle.

BLEDSON

(to Jake)

You brought your pictures?

IN THE DOORWAY OF THE SHED - MRS. GARCIA

Stepping into the sunlight -- a small plump woman, aged, wearing tight pants and a man's shirt. She smiles, flashing lots of gold teeth. And wraps a live rattlesnake around her neck.

MRS. GARCIA

(heavy accent)

You take a picture, huh?

She looks hopefully at her three visitors -- and then she's disappointed to find that nobody has a camera.

BLEDSON

It's me, remember. I told you
I was coming back. With my friends.

Mrs. Garcia chatters away in Spanish.

JAKE

What's she saying?

ADDIE

(a smile)

For a handsome man like you, she
would gladly show her tits --
for ten American dollars.

Jake's startled reaction turns into a forced smile which he
flashes at Mrs. Garcia -- shaking his head.

Mrs. Garcia laughs and shrugs -- and beckons them inside.

INT. THE SHED - DAY

Lots of cages. Lots of tanks. Fans going here and there. Light
and shadow.

ON ADDIE, JAKE AND BLEDSON

Following through -- Jake leans forward to peer into a shadowy
cage.

BIG RATTLESNAKE

Sliding close to the bars -- moving fast. Too fast. It opens
its mouth soundlessly -- the moist white fangs drop into place.

MORE SNAKES

Crawling, curious, active in the warmth of midday. All menacing
as hell itself.

ADDIE

Frightened, but fascinated. She's a woman who has never been
especially afraid of snakes -- but now she sees them as the
instruments of murder.

She moves away from the cages to where Jake is opening the
manila envelop for Mrs. Garcia.

ADDIE

(in Spanish)

He's going to show you some pictures,
Mrs. Garcia. We'd like to know if you've
ever seen any of these men before.

Jake takes out a handful of pictures.

THE PICTURES

They look like blown-up copies of drivers' license photographs -- or mug shots. Clearly a random collection.

SCENE

Mrs. Garcia holds the pictures close to her eyes.

MRS. GARCIA

(in Spanish)

The light is bad. May I take these outside?

They follow her out the door.

IN THE YARD

Mrs. Garcia goes through the photographs slowly.

ADDIE

Jake, -- she's practically blind.

Jake looks angry -- and trying not to let it out.

JAKE

Bledsoe, what the hell --

Mrs. Garcia stops at a photograph in amazement.

MRS. GARCIA

Vaya! Este, si, es precisamente el hombre. Este!

She holds up a photograph -- of Robert Hawley Quinn.

MRS. GARCIA

(in Spanish)

He was the one who paid for them. I wouldn't forget this guy. It was a lot of money -- and he paid in dollars, too.

ADDIE

(overlapping)

This is the man, she says. The one who paid! He paid a lot of money!

MRS. GARCIA

(in Spanish)

This one I'm sure about. I don't see a picture of the other guy --

(cont.)

MRS. GARCIA (cont.)
that one was Mexican, he sounded
like somebody from Torreon ...

As she chatters on the others react with rising excitement.

ADDIE
(overlapping)
He wanted to guarantee that the
snakes he bought would attack and
kill a bull that weighed a
thousand pounds.

Mrs. Garcia, nodding. Goes on.

ADDIE
(overlapping)
She wants to know if what she's
telling you is important. She says
she's hungry. I told her yes.

Mrs. Garcia continues.

ADDIE
(overlapping)
She told him, yes, that was possible
provided ...
(pauses)
... provided the snakes were
injected with a drug, an amphetamine
stimulant, before being put into
contact with the bull.

Mrs. Garcia adds something.

ADDIE
(overlapping)
She showed them how to do it.

JAKE
I want her to show me.

ADDIE
Now?

CLOSE AT SNAKE TANK

Two enormous rattlers hissing, writhing.

THE SCENE

While Jake and Addie watch, Mrs. Garcia takes a limber pole
about twice the length of a riding crop, a leather loop
attached to the end of it, and catches up the head of one of

the rattlers in the loop. In her other hand she holds a syringe. She dangles the snake in the air and jabs the syringe into his belly.

ADDIE AND BLEDSOE REACTING

They are chilled.

JAKE REACTING

Enraged.

JAKE

(cutting in)

Tell her we need a sworn affidavit.

BLEDSOE

Jake -- I don't know -- she could balk at that --

JAKE

What did I come all this way for then?

He's getting wired. Keyed up. Bledsoe looks nervous.

BLEDSOE

Jake, that's tricky down here. I shouldn't be here.

Mrs. Garcia is getting edgy. She hands the pictures back.

JAKE

Ask her. Ask her!

ADDIE

(in Spanish)

It would be a great help to these people if you would say what you have just told us in front of a notary.

MRS. GARCIA

Por que?

JAKE

Eight people are dead, God damn it! Tell her!

ADDIE

Son muertos ocho --

MRS. GARCIA

(in Spanish)

What are you talking about?
(cont.)

MRS. GARCIA (cont.)

You're crazy. This is none of my business.

(heading for the house)

Get out of here. All of you. I don't swear to anything.

Jake runs after her and grabs her by the arm -- she pulls away with a blow and dashes for the house.

BLEDSON

Jake -- let's get out of here!

Bledson is hauling Addie back to the car as Mrs. Garcia slams the screen door.

MRS. GARCIA

Mira, loco!

The screen bulges outward -- pushed out by both barrels of a great big shotgun. We HEAR the TRIGGER pulled back.

JAKE

(stopped)

I hope you burn in hell, lady.

Jake backs off -- then deliberately turns his back to the door and walks back to the car.

JAKE

(loud)

You and your children and your grandchildren -- I hope you all burn in hell.

Bledson opens the door of the car.

BLEDSON

For chrissakes, Jake, let's go.

CUT TO:

INT. TOURIST SHOP, MATAMOROS - NIGHT

Addie waggles a puppet of Cantinflas at Jake. His rage seems somewhat abated.

ADDIE

Wouldn't Mrs. Garcia look great in court? She walks in with this snake wrapped around her boobs?

She replaces the puppet on its hook. They continue to walk.

JAKE

It would have been a nice move.
Spring the affidavit on him.
Confrontation. What's he do
then, huh?

ADDIE

You almost walked into both
barrels of a shotgun, you were
so mad.

They walk a little further, where the shops end facing an -
immense open plaza. Jake obviously means to walk across it.
Addie hesitates.

ADDIE

He's going to get away with it,
if he steps now, isn't he?

JAKE

Yes.

INT. MATAMOROS HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Jake collects a key from the desk and walks over to Addie. They
walk to the elevators, not touching.

They step into the elevator and lean against opposite walls,
staring at each other.

JAKE

You want to know the truth. I
wondered if I could be wrong
about Bob Quinn.

ADDIE

I've never even known what fear
was, Jake. Not 'til this morning.

(a beat)

It's just a terrible feeling!

He leans close, touches her to reassure. She's shaking:

JAKE

It's okay.

ADDIE

(quietly; miserable)

You know -- when she pushed that gun
in your face -- I wet my pants a little.

Jake makes a little laugh despite himself.

ADDIE

Will you marry me, please?

Jake cannot bring himself to answer.

EXT. B.Q. RANCH - DAY

Jake's car is parked in the drive again. He stands on the front steps, talking to an Indian HOUSEKEEPER.

HOUSEKEEPER

He was down in the office, I think.
It's the building with the blue roof.

Jake leaves the house.

WITH JAKE

Walking through this ranch. It's beautiful -- but not happy
Like a big machine. Vehicles. Fences. He stops and looks.

EXT./INT. RANCH SHOP - DAY

A machine shop. And conceivably a woodworking shop. There a
drills, punches, lathes -- all sorts of equipment. And --
unfortunately, two fellows trimming two-by-fours.

EXT. RANCH OFFICE - DAY

A building with a blue roof. Jake knocks on the door. Waits
He looks through the window. And something that he sees ins
makes him go in (the door is open).

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Jake is looking at a wall -- covered with pictures. Neatly
framed, but some merely taped. Pictures of cattle and picture
of horses. Pictures of wild animals.

He moves toward them.

VOICE

You the man looking for Mr. Quinn?

WEBSTER, a big, old Indian foreman, has come in the door
behind Jake.

WEBSTER

He's up at the old place.

JAKE

He's quite a photographer, isn't he?

WEBSTER

Yes. 'Course he has every kind of equipment -- but you know if you call in your professionals, cost you a fortune. Everybody even thinkin' stud wants a batch of pictures.

(a beat)

Let me show you where Mr. Quinn is at.

As they go out:

JAKE

What do they do -- they write and say they want a picture of your bull?

WEBSTER

And not just one neither. All angles. You can understand in case there's some dispute or problem ...

EXT. HIGH PASTURE UPPER RANCH - DAY

A jeep drives past an old trailer with a wooden vestibule at the entrance. A gigantic antenna sits on top. The jeep pulls around, stops in front of an old log barn set back from the terrible shack of a house, shaded by big, hundred-year-old trees. Jake gets out first. Surprised.

WEBSTER

Right in there. I hope Mr. Quinn is expecting you.

JAKE

I think he is.

Webster smiles at what he thinks is a joke, gives a little wave and walks away.

CAMERA STAYS on Jake as he goes to the old barn -- goes in an open door -- into a shadowy area. He stops, waiting for his eyes to adjust to the shade.

IN THE LOG BARN:

CAMERA PULLS BACK so that Jake is in the b.g. And in the f.g.:

A body on a rope drops from the ceiling!

And jerks still. And turns out to be:

A DEAD COYOTE

Hanging from a ring through its nostrils. The body jerks as the rope is raised a little.

ANOTHER ANGLE - QUINN

Who is fastening the other end of the rope to a ring on the floor.

QUINN

Jake, hello. How was your trip to Mexico? How far down did you go?

JAKE

Just south of Matamoras, Bob.

QUINN

Hell, that's no distance at all.

Jake comes closer.

QUINN

This coyote killed one of my dogs. Came right into the yard this morning. They're bold. Aren't they, Jake?

JAKE

I visited a snake farm down there. Run by a one-eyed Mexican lady, if you can imagine such a thing.

Quinn lifts his hand. He has a very big knife in his hand. He sticks the knife in the coyote and slits its belly open. Pulls the guts out with his hand.

JAKE

Watching.

QUINN

I'm scared to death of snakes. Aren't you?

QUINN

Working on the coyote. Making cuts along the forelegs, the hind legs.

JAKE

I don't know -- something Mark Twain wrote. 'Of all the creatures that were made, man is the most detestable.'

Quinn begins to work the skin off. Not carefully -- but fast, in a practiced way.

JAKE

'Of the entire brood he is the only one, the solitary one, that possesses malice.'

(a beat)

'He is the only creature that inflicts pain for sport, knowing it to be pain.'

WEBSTER WATCHING QUINN AND JAKE

Quinn is watching Jake as he continues to skin the coyote.

QUINN

Mark Twain. Great writer, but with the white man's congenital inability to tell the truth.

(a beat)

Why did you quit the Jesuits, Jake? How does a man make the jump from the cross to the gun?

Jake doesn't answer -- but in his eyes we see he's been hit.

QUINN

I was schooled by Franciscans myself. They cut our hair real short. And then pray to Jesus. His hair way down to here.

(indicating)

Never made sense. Have you ever used your gun, Jake?

JAKE

No.

QUINN

Could you?

JAKE

(shift of tone)

Yes.

(pauses)

But I pray every day that I'll never have to, Bob. And so far my prayers have been answered.

QUINN

Webster, go bring out my books.

The old man instantly reappears with a bookshape wrapped in an ancient piece of buttersoft softened chamois.

Quinn unwraps it, revealing two ordinary black and white notebooks. One is aged and tattered. The other new. It is obvious that Quinn has great pride in this possession and handles it with care.

He opens the older one for Jake to see.

The pages are covered with very beautiful, flat primitive figures of Indians on horseback and writings in their language. Quinn hands the book to Jake and puts on his glasses.

QUINN

This is my grandfather's Winter Count. It's sort of a story of his life -- you might say.

(indicating)

This here shows where he was born ... that's the River of the Double Bend. The Missouri.

(turning pages)

This here's a hunting party.

JAKE

What's this?

QUINN

A year of big drought. A lot of people died.

He turns to an elaborate double-page spread of a big battle with crossed lines for the paths of many arrows and bullets.

QUINN

And this was a massacre ...

A silence. Then Quinn leafs silently through the rest of the book.

QUINN

In the old days these Winter Counts used to be made on buffalo hides. But even in my grandfather's time the buffalo were gone. His father had one but I don't remember what happened to it. Did you ever see that, Webster?

WEBSTER

Yes, I saw it once a long time ago. I think it's in a museum somewhere.

QUINN

(opening the newer book)

This here is my own Winter Count, you might say.

(cont.)

QUINN (cont.)

(proudly)

I speak and write my language but
I write this in English. It's for
when I have a son. Someday I'll give
it to him so he can know about his
father's life, and where he came
from ... and why he did what he did.

Jake staring at him. Quinn closes book. Wraps it delicately.

QUINN

Before you go I'd like to show
you something, Jake.

EXT. AIRSTRIP - DAY

A single engine plane taxis along the strip -- past a hanger
with two larger planes. Finally it takes off -- leaving behind
the tarmac that says B.Q.RANCH in enormous letters.

EXT. THE PLANE - IN THE AIR - DAY

Circling to gain altitude.

IN THE COCKPIT

Quinn piloting. Jake beside him. Quinn tilts the plane so
that Jake can see better.

QUINN

We're higher than the eagles.
That's my whole world, Jake.
That's my whole world.

The plane begins to descend.

LONG AERIAL TRACKING SHOT - DAY

OVER the ranch -- a gliding bird's eye (or God's eye) view
of -- ranch headquarters -- cattle grazing -- open range --
wild horses -- forests -- finally THE RIVER.

The plane follows the river, wheeling with its turns.

QUINN'S VOICE (o.s.)

They're sucking the rivers dry
everywhere. They say they need
the water -- that's a lie, Jake.
They can't bear beauty. Beauty
insults and humiliates them.

INT. QUINN'S SHACK - HIGH PASTURE - DAY

The atmosphere and furniture of a poor reservation Indian's home.

Quinn pours cognac into a couple of old mismatched coffee cups.

QUINN

Are we going to continue our games, Jake?

He brings the cup to Jake.

JAKE

I think not, Bob.

Quinn hands him the cup.

QUINN

Jake, your problem, if I may say so --

JAKE

Is --

QUINN

You don't play to win. You play for the sake of the game. Well a game has no value in itself.

He stops abruptly, moves to a crude boxwood chessboard. Jake strolls over too. Jake picks up a piece.

JAKE

Interesting.

Jake puts the piece back on the board. He finishes his drink. Quinn adjusts the piece Jake touched to that it's perfectly centered. Jake moves away to put down his glass.

QUINN

I carved it myself.

(a beat)

We had a bad storm. The winter of 'sixty-nine-'seventy. I was snowed in up here alone for a month. I took the wood from a crate.

JAKE

You know, those coffin pictures. They were taken with a fast action camera. A Leica.

QUINN

Krauts make good cameras. My
old Leica got lost in darkest
Africa. Some nigger stole it.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Addie is fishing in the river. Her hair is pulled back with a rubber band. The sun is brilliant on the branches of the trees beside the water. Addie turns her head, scanning the sand bars and the cut banks with small, searching movements of her eyes. Momentarily, she casts her line again.

EXT. ADDIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Jake drives up, gets out of his car, walks to the front door slowly. He's preoccupied. He rings the doorbell. Marylee opens the door. Cold sober. Her eyes moving too much.

JAKE

Is she here?

MARYLEE

(nervously)

She's fishing. She said something
about using a little fish to catch
a big fish.

JAKE

(alarmed)

What?!

Jake turns on his heels and is out the door before she can react. Runs past:

The postman delivering a packet of mostly junk mail and a package the size of a shoebox wrapped in brown paper.

Jake reacts. Slides to a stop in the gravel, then retraces his steps, grabs the package from the postman's hands.

POSTMAN

What the --

Jake tearing off the wrappings.

POSTMAN

Hey!

Jake rips open the box. Marylee's eyes are wide as saucers now. Jake takes out a sexy pair of red ladies shoes ordered through a mail order catalogue. He shoves the box and paper into her arms and bolts for his car.

EXT. THE RIVER - DAY

Jake's car pulls up, lurches to a stop alongside Addie's pickup. The doors are open. Jake gets out, hurrying to the river.

RIVERBANK

Slowly Jake begins to pick up his pace until he is running. As he runs he becomes more alarmed. He stops abruptly. Sees:

ADDIE

Standing hip-deep in the water. She has a line out and is sipping quickly from a little flask.

There is a moment of silence with only the RIVER SOUNDS.

Jake approaches her, breath rasping in his lungs.

Sensing someone, Addie jerks around.

ADDIE

(smiling)

Oh, hi, Jake.

JAKE

Addie. What the hell do you think you're doing?

ADDIE

Fishing.

(pauses)

If Bob Quinn killed those people as if he were swatting flies -- Well, I'm not some bug that he can squash because I annoyed him.

(a beat)

If he wants to fill my coffin, he knows right where to find me.

Jake rolls his eyes heavenward in prayer or supplication, or both. But he makes no reply.

The silence between them widens.

Addie, staring at Jake, sips from her flask, holds it up as a peace offering to him.

He shakes his head and sits down resignedly in the grass.

Addie flicks the supple rod and casts again. A light rustling of her line ripples through the air.

Jake sits contemplating the pastoral around him. He looks at Addie as if trying to unravel a big knot. Reaches in his pockets

for cigarettes. Finds none. Then he pulls himself up and heads over to his car.

JAKE'S CAR

He is almost at the car when his attention is caught by something.

JAKE

Moves closer to Addie's pickup to see more clearly -- stops as if paralyzed. And then quickly reaches in through the half-open door.

ADDIE'S PICKUP

With infinite care Jake slowly lifts a coffin from the disarray of fishing gear off the seat.

JAKE

His face galvanically tense. Staring at the photo inside.

ON PHOTO

Addie's hatless head in profile. She stands waist-deep in water and holding aloft a supple fishing rod.

JAKE

Appears greatly shaken, but he is nevertheless mechanically examining the coffin.

JAKE'S HAND

Goes out to touch the photo of Addie, tenderly, as if it were flesh. For a moment, there is only the SOUND of Jake's BREATHING and the distant RASP of Addie's reel, spinning off line.

THE RIVER

Swirling -- a patch of sunlight drifts over the surface. Something STRIKES the water -- a trout fly.

ADDIE

Makes a little wincing GASP of surprise.

JAKE

Turns away from Addie's pickup and walks back toward the river. He is carrying the coffin in his hand. He is disturbed that she has not told him about it, but he hides his anger and is gentle with her.

JAKE
When did you get this?

ADDIE

Her mouth stretches open but no sound is coming out.

JAKE
Addie?

Addie emits a strange little choking sound, grasps her throat with a hand, her eyes go wild, the thermos slipping from her grasp and crashing into the water.

JAKE
Addie? Addie, what's wrong?
What's the --

Half submerged, Addie has both hands tearing at her throat. Her face is discoloring. Her mouth is open, gasping for air.

JAKE
(lunging into the water)
Addie!

She's suffocating.

JAKE
Addie!

He grabs her up, the horrible realization upon him.

JAKE
Oh, my God!

And again:

JAKE
Oh, my God!

And now it is a prolonged roar of agony. The water flowing around Addie's face. White as it circles her hair.

JAKE
Ch, my Godddddddddd!

IN THE WATER

Addie's coffin, borne away by the current.

INT. ADDIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Jake carrying Addie, walks in. Her body hangs there in his arms.

In bursts Marylee. Jake looks up at her as she freezes at the sight.

JAKE

She's dead.

Marylee puts her hands around herself, one of them up to hold her head.

EXT. ADDIE'S BARN AND YARD - DAY

A saddle is thrown over the back of a horse. And it's Jake who threw it there. He cinches it, tests it. He grabs for the reins.

MARYLEE

Standing a few feet away. Watching him. Frightened.

JAKE

Looking back at her, with a look that admits no argument. He mounts the horse and rides off.

EXT. QUINN RANCH MAIN GATE - DAY

Serene blue sky. A few perfect white clouds drifting over the gateway. The gate shut and locked.

A pickup is parked by the gate. CAMERA moves in on the pickup. A young cowboy sits inside, the windows are open, and you can HEAR his RADIO. He's drinking a carton of milk.

There is the SOUND of an automobile in the distance. As it grows louder, the cowboy turns down the radio and lifts a shotgun from the gunrack. He holds it loosely ready.

The car -- a Volvo -- shoots past. Full of tourists. The cowboy puts the gun away.

CUT TO:

EXT. QUINN'S RANCH FROM THE MOUNTAIN TOP - DAY

The land like a great swelling of ocean grass.

JAKE

On horseback. On the overlook where he stood with Addie. He looks at the distant river and suddenly he is moved almost to tears. He kicks the horse and moves forward.

EXT. TRAIL DOWN TO QUINN'S RANCH - DAY

Jake urging the horse forward. Faster than it should go. The horse plunges down the trail, sweating and almost stumbling.

EXT. CATTLE RANCH - DAY

Cattle feeding. Jake appears over a rise and canters down past the herd.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

High water and strong currents. The river looks muscular and powerful. Jake rides into view on the opposite bank. When the horse comes to the bank, he balks. Jake urges him, and finally gets off and leads him by the reins into the water.

CROSSING THE RIVER

Jake and the horse struggling against the current. Jake has to cling to the horse in order not to be swept away.

But they make it across -- barely -- the horse so eager to climb the other bank that Jake almost loses him.

EXT. QUINN'S SHACK - UPPER RANCH - LONG SHOT - LATE AFTERNOON

The shack with the huge antennae on the high pasture is silhouetted against the light in the west.

REVERSE ON JAKE

On horseback, at the edge of an outcropping. The slanting light hot on his face.

EXT. QUINN'S SHACK - LATE AFTERNOON

Smoke drifts out of the stovepipe chimney. There's the SOUND of a shot reverberating. Clear and loud, but distant. Quinn comes out the shack's door, carrying a rifle.

Quinn lifts his head and sniffs the air like an animal and stares into the west.

There is a ragged line of light along the prairie -- a grass fire is blowing down on him.

ON JAKE

JAKE

Now you'll have to come to the river.

The herd of antelope breaks away from the fire.

The fire comes at a terrifying rate, leap-frogging forward as sparks are blown out to start advance fires across the main front.

Smoke blows so that Quinn can scarcely see.

CUT TO:

Prairie chickens explode from cover: under the feet of Quinn's horse.

The fire continues to gain and a line extends across his front.

The white stallion, SHRILLING and TRUMPETING.

In a great leap Quinn plunges into the flame and smoke.

For an instant he is in the ROARING smoking hell of the fire.

Then he bursts through on the other side -- first into the black of the burnt-off prairie, then onto the unburned grass near the river.

Quinn rides at a steady pace on his stallion. We see he has a rifle in a saddle holster.

Something he sees ahead makes him slow down.

The solitary figure of Jake on horseback comes out of a fold in the earth.

Quinn rides slowly toward Jake. Behind him the entire southern hemisphere is ablaze with red fire.

QUINN

(calling)

You shouldn't be here, Jake. I
don't want you on my land.

Instead Jake rides slowly forward.

In a moment, Quinn levels his rifle and fires.

The shot almost at Jake's ear.

QUINN

(louder)

I don't want you on my land.

Quinn reins his horse, pulling back a few paces. His form trembles and changes through the shimmer of heat waves.

QUINN
(up a notch)
You're out of your head, Jake.

JAKE
(calling)
You killed her.

QUINN
(almost to himself)
A man takes things as they come.

Quinn spurs his horse forward.

Jake picks up a gallop.

Quinn's horse looks like a huge wolf, his mouth open to bite.

JAKE

Puts himself on a collision course with Quinn.

The onrushing Quinn is leveling his rifle for a second shot when his horse falters, stumbling and drops forward on its front legs.

There is a blurring crash.

Quinn and Jake slam into each other with a sickening THUD.

Quinn's horse plunges up and stands trembling.

Jake's horse has fallen too and is thrashing about getting to his feet.

ON JAKE

Practically fainting from pain. One arm is useless, broken. His nose has started to bleed. He looks around for Quinn.

ON QUINN

He quiets his horse, who is lathered, panting, still wild with the collision. He and Jake look at each other for a moment. In the silence there is only the PANTING of their horses.

QUINN
I'll send one of my boys for you.

QUINN

Backing away from Jake -- but his eyes are searching the ground.

QUINN'S RIFLE

From his saddle holster. It has tumbled off near a bush.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Quinn, watching Jake, is backing toward the rifle. Jake is moving, trying to see what Quinn is doing.

Quinn stoops for the rifle -- and goes dead still.

An arm of brownish flesh pours over a rock, moving in his direction.

A RATTLE SNAKE

It halts, head weaving, back and forth, tongue flicking out, trying to make up its mind about striking.

JAKE

Comes closer -- sees the snake. And the rifle on the ground. He lowers his gun.

QUINN

Looks back at the snake. And starts to move again. Slowly. Staring at the rattlesnake, absolutely certain that he has the sheer willpower to dominate this reptile.

THE SNAKE

Watching Quinn with its inscrutable cat's eyes.

QUINN

Reaching for the rifle. Slow motion in real time.

HIS FINGERTIPS

Touching the stock.

Closing on the gun, lifting it.

THE SNAKE STRIKES

Like an arrow, like lightening -- with the furious racket of its RATTLE.

JAKE

Watching -- he GASPS involuntarily -- he even moves forward out of some basic human sympathy. Then stops -- as if he can't believe what he sees.

QUINN

Somewhere he's found the strength to hold on to the rifle -- while he tears the snake's jaws out of his flesh with his left hand.

He flings the snake away and moves forward.

Staring at Jake.

Raising the gun. Aiming it.

We believe in this instant this man can do anything.

JAKE

Watching him. Too awed to be afraid for himself -- for this moment.

QUINN

Takes another step toward Jake, lifts the rifle slightly.

QUINN

It's a good day to die, Jake.

And the shock hits him. As if death had gripped his heart.

JAKE

Stands there at the edge of the river, watching. He looks half destroyed, his clothing ripped. He is stiff and sore and spent.

QUINN

Goes down like an old bear. Onto his knees. He drops the rifle. His huge head tilts forward, then up. A puff of wind stirs the mane of grey hair. His voice comes in a horrible RASP.

QUINN

I want to make my confession.

JAKE

What?!

QUINN

I'm dying, damn you! Absolve me!

Jake is incredulous. With sudden, passionate hate, he strikes Quinn with the heavy butt end of his gun.

Quinn GASPS, falls back, MOANING, murmuring:

QUINN

Oh, my God, please help me. Help me.

In Jake's face, a silent torment, an emotion like awful indecision, inner struggle, as he stares down at Quinn, blood seeping from his mouth, dazed; and then straining towards Quinn as if urged on by some invisible force, slowly -- sinks to his knees.

JAKE

You bastard!

Jake smashes Quinn flush in the face with his fist. We can HEAR the SOUND of Quinn's jaw crack. Then hoarsely as if the words are being wrenched from his throat:

JAKE

...Are you sorry for the sins
of your past life?

Jake smashes him again, punctuating his question.

QUINN

Weakly nods his head, an assenting SOUND escaping from his bloodied mouth.

JAKE

Explodes with another blow to Quinn's wounded face. The camera holds him in a ferocious crucifixion of tension and hate. A final moment of indecision passes. He lays aside his gun. Lifts his hand in absolution over Quinn before him -- hesitates, it is shaking a bit. He looks at it and begins again to make the sign of the cross. His face seems to glow as if drawing a kind of life from the gesture and the words.

JAKE

"Ego te absolvo, in nomine Patris,
et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti ...

A GUN SHOT

Rents the final hours of the light.

QUINN

Lowering Jake's gun.

JAKE

Struggles to raise himself; staring at Quinn.

QUINN

Watching Jake.

JAKE

Staggering up, stumbling back into the river.

QUINN

Eyes fixed on Jake falling.

JAKE

Struggling to stay afloat, gasping for breath. Trying to keep his eyes focused on Quinn.

QUINN

God's work.

He turns his gaze to the orange red fireball, low on the horizon. Sitting upright, like an old Indian, impassive; staring directly into the flaring sunset.

QUINN

His will.

THE RIVER

Rushing by.

JAKE

Still struggling against the hold of the current.

THE SUN

Suddenly floods the river with light. The river, a scarlet serpent winding into the distance -- away from the dark mountains.

JAKE

His face shining.

And his figure diminishes until he is only a small moving blur on the vast expanse of the land.

THE END